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the 1990s, the number of people with a mental health problem has increased by 50% (Mental Health Foundation 2000). The prevalence of mental health problems in the UK is estimated to be 10% (Mental Health Foundation 2000).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of people with mental health problems. The Department of Health (2000) has published a strategy for mental health care, which aims to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. The strategy is based on the following principles: (1) people with mental health problems should be treated as individuals; (2) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions about their care; (3) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to live in the community; (4) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to work and study; (5) people with mental health problems should be given the opportunity to form and maintain relationships with others. The strategy also sets out a number of targets for the improvement of mental health care.

One of the key targets of the strategy is to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. This can be achieved by a number of measures, including: (1) improving the quality of care; (2) improving the access to care; (3) improving the support for carers; (4) improving the support for people with mental health problems; (5) improving the support for people with mental health problems who are in contact with the criminal justice system. The strategy also sets out a number of targets for the improvement of mental health care.

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Hector

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# The Yellow Fiend

By  
*Mary M.?*  
**Mrs. Alexander**  
*auntie (French) Hector*  
Author of "The Wooing o't," "Her Dearest Foe," etc.

1825-1902



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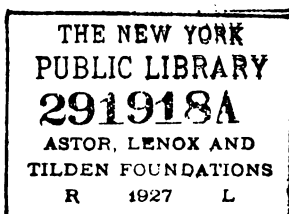
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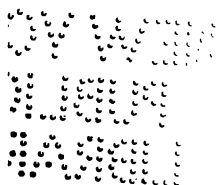




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## THE YELLOW FIEND

### CHAPTER I.

"THERE'S no use coming such a morning as this," said a tall, bony woman, with iron-grey hair, sharp, dark eyes and a strong face, as she stood holding open the entrance door of a solemn, four-storeyed house in Osborne-place, and addressing a small boy in a pair of very large, tattered trousers and a rag of a cap pressed down on his wild, red hair. "No use at all," repeated the housekeeper or cook (she might be either), looking up complainingly at the murky sky and fast falling rain.

"It's 'orful hard," said the boy, with a rueful glance round. "No one'll have their steps swep' such a mornin', and I am nigh starved."

"Aye, I daresay! Go down and wait by the area door. I'll give you a crust and a drop of tea. Stand out of the way, here's the postman!"

That messenger of good and evil sprang up the steps and thrust a couple of letters into the woman's hand, turning to walk swiftly away without a word.

"Two letters," she mused, "and one has a foreign stamp! It's long since he had one like that!" She stepped back into the hall and closed the door.

It was a spacious hall, paved with black and white marble and divided by an inner door. Passing

through it she tapped on a door to the left. It was partially opened, and a long, lean hand put out to seize the letters.

The woman descended the kitchen stairs and proceeded to fill a large mug from a brown teapot which simmered on the hob. Then she cut a thick slice of bread and took them to the area door.

"Here, my lad, here's a drop of tea for you and a bit of bread and dripping."

"Thank ye, mum. God bless ye, mum."

Within, the housekeeper, as she seemed, busied herself about various matters, till a tap on the door and a hysterical jingle of one of the bells in the passage called her attention at the same moment.

"He has lost no time," she said, with a good-humoured smile, as she hurried to the door. "And, lor, what a hurry the master is in! There, be off now, and don't come to-morrow if it rains."

Hastily locking the door, she arranged a teapot, cup and saucer and a rack of nice, crisp toast on a tray, which she carried upstairs, again knocking at the door of the back room whence a voice bade her "come in."

She entered a large, well-proportioned chamber. It was well and solidly furnished. In a deep recess behind the door stood a narrow, attenuated iron bedstead which seemed to forbid repose. Beside the window was a large mahogany bureau with a circular front. The rest of the furniture was sound and old-fashioned, the carpet threadbare and faded; a drapery of very ancient moreen was stretched above the window, but no curtains depended from it,

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and although the aspect of the apartment was unspeakably dreary it was well kept and clean.

To and fro past the bureau an old man paced—a man of middle height, who might once have been good looking, even handsome. His well-shaped shoulders were stooped, and his grey dressing-gown hung on them as if on a pair of clothes-pegs. His hair, slightly waved and silvery white, hung over his collar, his face, of a waxen pallor, was so thin that the framework of its bones could be distinctly traced. The eyes were his most remarkable feature, deep set, dark, restless, devouringly inquisitive, and over-arched with black brows in strong contrast with his white hair—often veiled by his long lashes, more frequently resentful, defiant, distrustful. As he raised them to his housekeeper's they expressed a curious mixture of indignation and fear. He paused in his pacing, and, striking a letter he held open, exclaimed:

"She is dead! That infernal, intrusive busybody is dead!"

The housekeeper gazed at him as if puzzled.

"What woman, sir? There be many busybodies."

"You know, you must know, that half-German woman—what's her name? Norman, Miss Norman, who used to pester me with letters till I ceased to answer. It is some time since she wrote—some years. Hey?"

"Yes, sir, I remember now. Quite five years, I should say," returned the housekeeper, her countenance changing. "Well, if she is dead she cannot trouble you any more, sir."

"There you are mistaken, utterly mistaken, Mrs. Pinnock," he exclaimed, resuming his troubled walk. "She has passed it on, passed on her mission to torment and impose, and—and persecute! But I'll be firm, Mrs. Pinnock. I'll resist—resist this audacious attempt. There, read, read! It's equal to an attempt to murder—read it! You are no chatterer, Mrs. Pinnock, and I should not care if you were."

He sank into the chair which he had thrust back from the bureau to ring for his housekeeper, and, seizing a paper-knife, began to beat it nervously upon the writing-desk which occupied the centre of the bureau.

Thus exhorted, Mrs. Pinnock took the letter he held out with evident reluctance. It was written in a clear business hand on thin foreign paper, and addressed to "Philip Ardell, Esq., 54, Osborne-place, Bloomsbury, London, W. C.," and began

"SIR,—Having found your address among Miss Helen Norman's papers, when as English Vice-Consul and her nearest friend in Paris I took possession of them, I have undertaken the sad task of informing you that she died on April 25th, little more than a week ago, after a brief attack of severe diphtheria.

"By the request of her niece and adopted daughter I have assumed the duties of executor, and find the poor lady left little more than will pay her doctor's bill and funeral expenses.

"As her niece, Miss Margaret Ardell, tells me she is your granddaughter, I think it right to consult with you as to what is best to be done on her behalf, for she is practically penniless.

"I ought, perhaps, to mention that Miss Norman taught

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my daughters German for the last few years, and Miss Ardell, who is not quite nineteen, gave English lessons in one or two families in this neighbourhood. Both ladies were much liked and respected; and my wife is much attached to Miss Ardell.

"We shall in all probability quit Paris in a few months for a colonial appointment, and I should be glad to know that your granddaughter was safe under your protection before I leave Europe—Hoping for a speedy reply, I am, sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"FREDERIC CALDECOTT.

"Rue de la Tour, Passy, Paris."

Mrs. Pinnock did not read rapidly, and her master watched her with impatience as she deciphered the contents of the letter, till, no longer able to contain himself, he rose and resumed his pacing.

At last Mrs. Pinnock solemnly folded up the letter in silence.

"Well," cried Mr. Ardell, quivering with angry eagerness. "What do you think of that?"

"Well, sir, I think he seems a kind gentleman," said Mrs. Pinnock, as if feeling her way, "but——"

"Kind fool! Kind hypocrite! Kind intriguer! You'll find the girl has some claim upon the gentleman which he wishes to palm off on me," interrupted Mr. Ardell, angrily.

"Of course, sir, you know a deal more than I do, but the young lady is your granddaughter, I believe."

"And what of that? Am I to be burdened with the—the outcome of another's culpably insane folly, even though that other called me father? The young

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lady, indeed. The young beggar! What can the child of a creature that couldn't hold his own with the tyrant gold be worth? She shall not darken my doors, I tell you."

"Of course, you'll do what seems best to you, sir," returned Mrs. Pinnock, growing very grave, her face settling into a look of resolution. "Maybe it might be better for Miss Ardell to have an allowance and live in a family where she would be with other young people than——"

"Have you lost your senses?" asked Mr. Ardell, staring at her with fierce displeasure. "I sometimes think you have some brains, some sense of the value of money, then again you talk like that, like a double-distilled idiot! Why should I give a total stranger an allowance, a creature who has no claim upon me? No one would expect it."

Mrs. Pinnock made no reply.

"Did you hear me? You stupid, wrong-headed, obstinate old——"

"I may be all that, sir, but I don't like to be told it. And there are plenty of places in this very street, and in the squares close by, where I could get better wages and civiller treatment."

"Then why the deuce don't you go and find one of them? You don't stay here for love of me."

"Very good, sir. You'll be wanting your porridge and a cup of tea," said Mrs. Pinnock; and she would have left the room but for a cry of "Stay, I tell you!" from her amiable master.

She therefore placed the tray on a small table and

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put a chair by it in silence. Mr. Ardell seated himself mechanically and began to eat his porridge.

"Is this the same piece of butter I had last night?" he asked, bending down to examine a piece of about two ounces on a cheese plate.

"It is, sir," replied Mrs Pinnock, with melancholy assurance.

"Humph! I thought I left more. By the way, if you have a five-pound note to spare I think I could get you a couple of shares in this new Four Per Cent. amalgamated stock of Ruabon and Gresford Lines."

"Much obliged, sir, but I haven't anything to spare."

A pause followed, during which Mrs. Pinnock drew up the blinds into a level line.

"I think I'll go and see Briggs," resumed her master. "He is a sensible man of business."

"I would, sir, if I was you. You'll be back to lunch?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Bring me my boots."

"It's a terrible wet morning, sir. Hadn't you better wait till after twelve? It may clear up, and if one of your bad colds——"

"Nonsense," he interrupted. "I hope I have no holes in my boots, eh?"

"I think you know me better than to suppose I'd fail to have them mended so long as they'll keep together, and that won't be much longer with the oldest pair."

"Bring them," returned her master, laconically.

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He had resumed his chair at the bureau, and was making some calculations with a stumpy pencil on a scrap of paper.

Having pulled on the boots which fully justified Mrs. Pinnock's opinion, Mr. Ardell looked round and saw that she held his coat and had placed his outside garment over a chair at hand.

"You'll excuse me, sir, but your top-coat is really not fit to be seen. The seams is that white, and the collar cleaned threadbare. I've scrubbed it that hard over and over——"

"What are you talking about? What does it matter? I don't care about such trash," he interrupted. "Do you think I would indulge in luxuries? No, no, no! Give me my stick and—let me see."

He took some coins out of his trouser pocket—a shilling, a sixpence, and a threepenny-piece in silver, two pennies and a farthing in copper. He counted them carefully.

"Enough, quite enough," he muttered, putting them back into his pocket.

"The 'buses will be crammed full, sir, on a day like this, and you didn't ought to risk catching a bad cold for the sake of saving a shilling."

"Ah, that's the way people grow reckless and spendthrift. What does a penny matter, or a shilling? And so they go on till the fiend gold gets the better of them—slips from their grasp, tramples upon them, and can never be caught again. I thought you had more sense, Mrs. Pinnock!"

Without waiting for an answer her irritable master walked out of the room and out of the house.

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"He is in a bitter bad temper this morning," said Mrs. Pinnock to herself as she followed him to close and lock the hall door. "I wonder how I've the patience to stay in this dungeon of a place with such an old skin-flint of a master—a human creature turned to gall and wormwood! But he ain't bad to *me*, and mostly does what I ask him, that's what smoothes me up the right way. We all have our dash of conceit. Then he *has* given me a helpin' hand with my bits of savings. What a lonely creature he is. I *do* wonder who'll get his savings."

## CHAPTER II.

SHAKING her head sagely Mrs. Pinnock descended to the kitchen, set on the stockpot with its miscellaneous contents which was the mainstay of the curious couple who were working out their battle of life in a contradictory condition of not unfriendly antagonism, and so took up her daily tale of bricks, for which in such an establishment the supply of straw was extremely scant.

Time slipped on and one o'clock struck. Still Mr. Ardell did not return.

The rain stopped, and the clouds lifted sufficiently to allow a watery gleam of sunshine to peep from between their murky folds.

Mrs. Pinnock was setting her master's table carefully in the large front parlour when a loud summons at the old-fashioned knocker startled her, and, putting down the plate basket, she went to open the door.

"Mr. Ardell at home?" asked a gentleman, who stood waiting for admittance, a remarkably well-dressed, well-groomed man.

"No, he has not come in yet."

"Ah! Rather awkward. Expect him in soon?"

"Yes, his dinner is waiting."

"Pray give him my card. I shall come back in about two hours."

"I'll tell him, sir," looking at the card.

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"Mr. Ardell didn't happen to say if he was going to Broad-street?"

"No, sir," shortly.

"Horrid morning, isn't it? Hope Mr. Ardell will not take cold."

"Hope not, sir, but he's terrible careless of hisself. You'll be back in a couple of hours, then?"

"Yes. Pray tell Mr. Ardell I only reached London last night."

He gave Mrs. Pinnock a polite smiling nod, and descended the steps.

"A nice, civil-spoken gentleman," thought Mrs. Pinnock, looking after him admiringly. "Shouldn't wonder if Mr. Ardell took a fancy to him. He might do worse than leave his money to a bright young fellow like that." She looked at the card and read "Cecil Brook" aloud. "It's two months and more since he has been here, and the master is always in a better humour when he comes."

It was considerably past one—his usual luncheon hour—when Mr. Ardell returned. He looked weary, his boots were extremely muddy, and he was splashed all over.

"Dear, dear, sir! Why, I do believe you haven't even taken a 'bus. I'll bring your shoes. I'm sure your feet are damp."

"There, that will do," he growled, ungraciously. "How am I to indulge in luxuries when everyone is determined to rob me, or force me to spend the few pounds I have gathered with pain and grief to keep me from the workhouse?"

The housekeeper hurried away, soon returning

with his shoes, and proceeded to take off his wet boots with care. Mr. Ardell never broke silence during the operation. Mrs. Pinnock poured him out some beer, but he took no notice of it, sitting in deep thought until his food—a basinful of thick Scotch broth and a large slice of bread—was brought to him.

“What does this cost?” he asked, knocking his spoon against the basin, as Mrs. Pinnock hovered about the room.

“Well, sir, I can’t say to a basinful, but the scrag end of a neck of mutton gives you four lunches and myself three dinners, so that costs in meat about two shillings, besides a trifle for vegetables.”

“Aye! There you go again. These unconsidered trifles are the ruination of men and families! Knowing the cost of living, you will hardly believe that those confounded, canting hypocrites—Briggs and Baker—have bullied me into—into what three hours ago I wouldn’t have believed any living soul could have persuaded me to do.”

“Bless my heart! Mr. Ardell, do you mean to say you are going to help the poor young lady, your granddaughter? Well, sir, I’m sure you’ll never repent it.”

“You are as big an idiot as they are! What reason have you for your absurd beliefs? I know I’m doing wrong, but I was between the devil and the deep sea. According to Briggs, I’d disgrace myself if I refused either to place this wretched girl in some costly school, or some such place, to train for teaching, or take her into my house. They have been use-

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ful to me—very useful—Briggs and the other, and it seems to me they might be less friendly, less active in my service if I refused to be guided by them—in this, anyhow. I didn't seem able to help myself, and I have promised to take her in—" he paused to groan aloud. "Later she might learn to do your work, and—and——"

"You could send me adrift, eh, sir?" put in Mrs. Pinnock, quietly. "All right, Mr. Ardell, I'll not forget."

"The devil opens your eyes, I believe! At any rate it will be a long time first, and if you do remember one thing I hope you will another—that I helped you to make a little you would never have had a chance of getting without me."

"Well, that's true, Mr. Ardell," she returned, good-humouredly, "so you must balance one with the other." Here she placed Brook's card before him. "The gentleman will call again, he said, after lunch."

"Oh, he will? That's right, that's right! And Mrs. Pinnock, here, get these things away, open the window; there's a vile smell of meat and gravy and dainties. He'll think I've had a feast, that I'm rolling in wealth. Here, I'll help you to open the window, and—and—cork up the bottle; put it away. Leave me the water and a plate of dry biscuits. Make haste. Sweep up the crumbs."

The housekeeper swiftly and handily removed all traces of the modest repast, and had hardly accomplished this when the knocker announced a visitor, and in a few seconds Mrs. Pinnock ushered Brook into the dining-room.

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He was scarcely above middle height, well and squarely, though slightly, built; his dark hair, cut rather short, was glossy and waved; his features straight and refined. He was clean shaved, shewing a remarkably firm jaw and close-shut mouth. When he smiled the whole expression of his face changed, his large, deep blue eyes lit up with a look of kindness and boyishness, except occasionally when a sneering glance of scorn could flash from them. It was rarely, however, that his self-command permitted this revelation.

"I am afraid you did not receive a letter I wrote to you from Buda-Pesth a week ago," said Brook, after they had exchanged greetings, as he drew a chair opposite to Ardell and took a note-book from his pocket.

"Yes, I did, but there was nothing in it that specially required a reply."

"True. I wish everyone acted on the same principle," returned Brook, smiling. "It would lighten the generally congested condition of one's correspondence considerably. Well, Mr. Ardell, I am quite prepared to refund your advance unless you feel disposed to take the excellent opportunity which offers at this moment of doing a little business in the new Russian Canal Loan, which is one of the best things I have heard of for some time."

He proceeded to set forth the advantages of the scheme not exactly in glowing colours, but in a cool, dispassionate statement of pros and cons, which was well calculated to impress a greedy listener. Old Ardell listened with all his ears, and was even

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tempted, as Brook perceived ; but his joy at the prospect of receiving his "own again with usury" out-balanced the temptation of risking his precious "ducats" so soon again.

"No, my dear sir, not at present. When an old man like myself has with difficulty garnered a scanty harvest—a little nest-egg wherewith to provide the necessities of his last days, and for a decent funeral—it is with trembling anxiety he ventures a few pounds hoping to gain an additional trifle, and when you get your own again the joy of having the wanderer safe, of touching the coin that has been long absent from your sight, your hands—is—overpowering. I cannot let it go so soon again!"

The young man smiled indulgently. "Then if you will look in at Broad-street to-morrow, and bring my promissory note, we'll settle up, and you may rest in peace. Can you call at 2.30?"

"Say 11.30, my dear sir. Never postpone to the afternoon what can be done in the morning," and he laughed with repulsive glee.

"As you like—only I am not always so early myself."

"Pray oblige me in this. I—I have a long day before me. Ah, good-morning. Very glad to see you again. Let me."

"Don't trouble; I can open the door myself." Brook shook hands cordially and departed. "I dare-say you are deuced glad to see me again, you old money-grubber!" he said to himself, as he walked away towards Holborn. "I have seen a few misers in my time, but never one like Ardell. He grows

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absolutely sentimental over his coin! Well, it is an all-important ingredient in every man's life."

To Mrs. Pinnock the prospect of a young girl inmate of the gloomy house over which she had presided for some monotonous years, was wildly exciting. She knew her eccentric master too well to let him see any symptom of the joyous ferment into which his decision to receive his granddaughter had thrown her.

"I'll have a desperate hard fight to get her enough to eat, and how I'll manage for a trifle more fire when the winter comes, I'm sure the Lord only knows! I wonder if she'll favour her grandfather. She might be pretty if she does, for he must have been a handsome man in his day. Anyhow, I'll do my best for the poor young creature. What a house for a young girl to come to! At all events, if she is poor and and has been accustomed to battle for her bread, she'll be broke in a bit."

That at the end of so many years' solitary confinement under Mr. Ardell's iron rule, Mrs. Pinnock should still have any human feelings left was indeed a wonderful instance of the preservative power which common sense and a fair amount of sympathy can exercise over the mind.

While she busied herself in making the best preparations she could for the expected guest, that victim of circumstances was travelling westward with a sad heart and hopeless outlook.

Margaret Ardell, though thoroughly English by descent, had never breathed the air of the famous island; nor had she much desire to do so. Born

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at Brussels, where her father, who possessed a fine tenor voice, was engaged for a series of concerts, his early death left her but a faint recollection of him. Her mother—a sweet, delicate, rather helpless woman, disposed to indulge in the luxury of woe—lingered on for a good many years. She took refuge with a sister who had played a mother's part to her own childhood. Together they had kept the wolf from the door by unremitting toil, one being a clever linguist, and Margaret's mother an accomplished musician. A small German town was the scene of their labours. Here they lived until after Mrs. Ardell's death, when Miss Norman, who thought her niece had gifts which promised well for her success in art, migrated to Paris, where she succeeded in obtaining a *clientèle* and placing little Margaret in a well-known studio.

The girl, whose friends and companions were principally French or German, with a sprinkling of Russians and a few—very few—of her own country people, had a dread of England, which was not lessened by her recollection of her mother's applications for help to the grandfather, who invariably refused, until he adopted the defensive—that is, complete silence. To be thus despatched to the guardianship of an ogre, as he seemed to her, was bad enough, but to be compelled to accept such a fate was the bitterest wrong of all.

About a fortnight later than the date on which Mr. Ardell received the letter from poor Margaret's friend, Mr. Caldecott, she found herself crawling in a four-wheeler from Victoria Station towards

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Osborne-place between seven and eight on a fairly fine morning. She was too tired to observe the entirely different aspect of the streets she passed through from all she had seen elsewhere. She had not suffered in crossing the Channel, but she had not been able to lose consciousness for a moment, and the trains on the Western line of France were neither quick nor so good fifteen years ago as at present.

A desperate desire for silence and a cup of coffee possessed her. A sense of suffering, of gloom and hopelessness all round numbed her faculties, and by the time she reached her grandfather's house, she could hardly muster sufficient English (though she always spoke it with her aunt) to ask the driver his fare and inquire if Mr. Ardell lived there. Mrs. Pinnock, however, had flown to the door as the cab drove up, and even ran down the steps to assist its little white-faced occupant to alight and take her small packages.

"I'm sure, miss, you must be that tired, and I *am* thankful there's a gleam of sun! Cabby, can you lift down the big box?"

"Box? It's a house! Why, it took three porters to heave it up there!"

"I have some money. I can pay," said Margaret Ardell, taking out her purse.

"Thankee, miss, but I don't see no one about; and it 'ud take a deal o' sixpences to pay for a broken back."

"Then it must stay in the street," she returned, with perfect composure, in a sweet voice but a strange accent, as it seemed to Mrs. Pinnock.

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"I've a boy below," she exclaimed, and, going to the area rails, she called, in a cautious tone: "Bill, Bill, come up here!" whereupon the small boy in the big trousers came swiftly and was received with scorn by Jehu.

"That 'ere bit of a gutter snipe to help lift such a helephant of a box!"

"Anyway, I can run and call one as can," said the resourceful imp.

"Yes, please. I will pay you," said the weary traveller.

"Hush, hush, miss! Don't mention paying till the work is done," ejaculated Mrs. Pinnock, emphatically.

Ultimately the boy returned with a loafer, the box was taken upstairs, a short but severe conflict over the amount to be given was concluded, and Mrs. Pinnock conducted the new inmate to her room.

### CHAPTER III.

MARGARET ARDELL was less than middle size, very slight, but not angular. She had a small head, "running over" with nut-brown curls and a twist of hair on the top; a colourless little brunette face, lit by a pair of hazel eyes, sad and solemn, surrounded by dark rings, indicating fatigue, and, perhaps, a trifle too far apart; an insignificant nose, a mouth too wide for beauty, surmounting a pretty, small chin; a pathetic figure in a meagre black frock, which yet hung gracefully, and a neat black straw hat adorned with a twist of crape and a large bow.

"She is no beauty, poor little soul!" was Mrs. Pinnock's mental verdict as she gazed upon her with profound compassion.

She looked such a child, such a helpless little soul, to be sent away to wither in the gloom and silence of her grandfather's dingy, desolate abode.

"I'm thinking you are dreadful tired, miss," began Mrs. Pinnock, kindly. "I'll bring you some breakfast, and then you lie down and have a good sleep. Your eyes look as if you hadn't shut them for a month."

"Thank you. I should be very glad of a cup of coffee," replied Margaret, or, as she was more generally called, "Madge."

"Well, miss, I'm sorry I haven't none in the house, but I can promise you a good cup of tea."

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"That will do very well. I often take tea."

"She does speak pretty," thought Mrs. Pinnock, struck by the young stranger's soft, sweet tones and dainty foreign accent. "You take off your hat and cape, and I'll bring your breakfast in a jiffy."

She hastened away, but on her return, tray in hand, she found that Madge had sunk down in the nearest chair and had not attempted to remove her outdoor garments, and was gazing at vacancy with an odd, dazed expression.

"Oh, dear! This will never do, miss. You must not take things so hard. You'll get used to the dull old house, and, anyway, no one will interfere with you. Let me take your cape. You'll be the better for taking off your bonnet. That's it. Now, I have made you a bit of buttered toast."

While she spoke she poured out a steaming cup of tea, handed the old silver sugar-basin, and poured a drop or two of cream into the tea.

Margaret Ardell drew up her chair and tasted her tea. "It is very good," she said, and proceeded to drink it with an evident sense of refreshment.

Mrs. Pinnock watched her with satisfaction, wishing she would speak more; for something about the little orphan forbade questioning, and Mrs. Pinnock longed to know the ins and outs of everything. At last the girl turned her eyes upon her companion and asked:

"Who are you?"

The words were, to say the least, uncivil. But the soft tone, the childlike simplicity with which the question was put, disarmed all inclination to make a

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tart reply, and Mrs. Pinnock said, with a broad smile:

"I'm your grandfather's housekeeper, miss, and the general servant into the bargain."

"Then you live here?"

"Yes, of course."

Madge smiled as if glad to hear it, and said: "I will go to bed. I shall be so thankful to sleep—to stop thinking."

"Yes, my dear young lady, try to sleep. Then you'll feel stronger and be ready to see Mr. Ardell at dinner. He dines at one. He is a trifle eccentric, but he'll soon find how pleasant it is to have a nice young lady in his house."

"I am not considered pleasant," said Madge, rising and beginning to take off her dress.

Mrs. Pinnock packed up her tray and departed, assuring the newly-arrived guest that she would come and call her in time to dress for the midday meal.

"She is too broken hearted to notice much," she said to herself, as she went noiselessly downstairs. "I do hope the master will behave decent to her; he can be cruelly unkind. What I cannot make out is, how any lawyer that was ever sworn in or proved that black was white and green no colour, could have managed to persuade Mr. Ardell to take anyone into his house—and above all things a young lady! I'm afraid he'll hate the sight of her. I do hope and pray he won't break her heart with his black looks and bitter words. I sometimes wonder if he isn't bitter to himself, too."

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Here Mr. Ardell's bell summoned her.

She found her master up and dressed, waiting for his tea and toast in the front parlour, where he always breakfasted and read the paper, while Mrs. Pinnock prepared his bedroom, where he wrote and poured over accounts and memoranda the greater part of his time.

He was pacing the room, and stopped short to gaze at his prime minister.

"Is she——" he began, and then broke off.

"She is," returned Mrs. Pinnock, with an intelligent nod.

"You did not come to me for money," he exclaimed, eagerly.

"The young lady had enough in her purse, sir."

"So she had money in her purse? She ought to give it to *me*; she isn't fit to keep money."

"You can ask her, sir, at dinner."

"Dinner! Must I have her to dine with me?"

"Where else is she to dine? You wouldn't put her to dine with *me*?"

"You are a good deal more important than she is. You—you can manage and save money. She can only spend it, I fancy, only spend it. Oh, my God, why am I compelled to have this creature near me?"

"Well, sir, that's just what I've been asking myself."

"You have been asking, eh? I couldn't help it—couldn't. God knows I couldn't help it."

He sat down suddenly, closed his lips tightly, and

kept profoundly silent as long as Mrs. Pinnock remained in the room.

"I wonder what'll come of it all," she thought, as she retired to her own premises. "Dear, dear! I am sorry for that poor young creature. She has a look of the old man, though. Won't he crush her if she lets him! And it's not likely she can stand up against such a stern old party. Well, I like to save up myself, but only to live for gathering gold and despising everyone who hasn't any, it's not living at all!"

At last Mrs. Pinnock, having laid the cloth to the best of her ability, ascended to Madge's room. "She'll just have time to dress. She doesn't look like one that would do a lot of titivating. She is sound asleep. It's cruel to wake her," was her next thought, as she watched the pale young face as it lay hushed in profound repose, looking almost childlike in the cessation of troubled thought; and while Mrs. Pinnock gazed, Madge woke.

"Have I overslept myself?" she exclaimed, half-rising and leaning on her elbow.

"Oh, no, you have half-an-hour to dress. Your grandpa has his dinner at one. It's half-past twelve now."

"Yes, plenty of time. Where shall I go when I am ready?"

"Just straight downstairs. I'll be about there, and take you into the room. If you'll excuse my speaking in this way, don't let on that you are in any way frightened of Mr. Ardell."

"Is he a sort of man to be afraid of?"

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"Well, yes, if you are not accustomed to him. There now, I'll leave you to dress."

This important function was sooner accomplished than Mrs. Pinnock anticipated, and just as Madge descended the stairs Mr. Ardell's bell sounded.

"Wait here a minute till I see what your grandpa wants," and Mrs. Pinnock entered his den.

"You rang your bell, sir?"

"Yes. Bring me my dinner here," said the old man, gruffly.

"Ah, what is it puts you against the young lady? She is that nice and quiet. She's been asking when she was to see her grandfather."

"Later on, later on," he said, hastily.

"You'd better have refused to let her come than behave so cruel to her when she arrives."

"That's no affair of yours. I won't sit at table with her, you presumptuous old stupid."

"You know I don't mind your bad names, but I am a mother myself, and I can't help feeling for the child, and she's little more. You may have your dinner by yourself, sir, but just let her come in and shake hands and say a kind word——"

"Let her come in for five minutes," cried Mr. Ardell, after a short pause, "then trouble me no more."

His face grew more like a waxen mask than ever, and an angry sparkle lit up his eyes.

Mrs. Pinnock gave him no time to change. She was in the hall almost before he ceased to speak.

"Mr. Ardell would be glad to see you, miss. He

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is not so well to-day, and will take a bite in his own room," she said, blandly.

Madge Ardell made no reply, but at once moved to the half-open door which the housekeeper threw wide, and quietly advanced till within a pace or two of the old man. He stood up and faced the intruder with a glare in his eyes like some creature brought to bay.

"There they stood, gazing at each other," Mrs. Pinnock used to say, in describing the interview to her son in after years. "I never saw the like of it. He was clenching his hands as if—God forgive me if I wrong him—he was wishing to throttle her! And she, that quiet and steady, her big brown eyes looking straight into his—not angry or frightened, but with a sort of grave pity—till he slowly turned away and sat down again. Then he says: 'If you don't like the place,' says he, 'or crave for luxuries,' says he, 'don't let me hear any nonsense on the subject; no one shall have luxuries in my house! Remember, I did not want you to come here. I was over persuaded—forced to take you in.'

"'I can understand that,' she answers, quite soft and mild, but very clear, 'by my own horror of coming.'

"He turned and looked at her as if surprised.

"'Have I your permission to stay here for a while?' she added, when they had looked at each other again.

"'You may; he says you must.'

"'Then I need not trouble you further.'

"She turned round, always very quiet, and out she

walked! I never saw the like of it before, and I hope I never may again! The hatred them two seemed to take against each other all at once! I felt as if the devil himself was cock-fighting with them."

When she got out of the room, Mrs. Pinnock found Madge sitting on one of the hall chairs looking very white.

"I stayed here to save you the fatigue of coming all the way up to look for me. The stairs here must be fearfully fatiguing."

"Oh, my dear young lady," cried the housekeeper, "I am that sorry and ashamed to think my master would speak to you like that!"

"Why should he like me?" said Madge. "We have never met before, and I have never done anything to earn his liking. And to like people because they are related to you is rather stupid; and I *must* stay here, or starve or live on the charity of someone else. I am sorry to impose myself on Mr. Ardell, but they tell me he is very rich. I shall not cost him much, and when I find something to do I shall release him. Then, neither my father nor myself have ever cost him anything."

"I don't suppose anyone has. But, my dear young lady, try and get round him. Defying him will only make him worser and harder."

"What will be will be," said Madge.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE same light which strove so hard to brighten the close ranks of the houses in Bloomsbury produced a much more enlivening effect upon the trees and gardens surrounding a few old-fashioned cottages still left standing on the secluded space between Alpha and St. John's Wood-roads.

In one of the most secluded of these a little two-storeyed edifice, standing in a neatly-kept lawn, beautified with flower-beds and shaded by an elm-tree, which looked too large for the little enclosure, a note of preparation had evidently sounded. The French windows of the sitting-room were set wide open, and some chairs stood upon the grass; while a stout servant-girl and an elderly woman were beating and brushing various cushions.

The entrance to this abode gave upon a very narrow, winding road or lane; and the house was screened from view by a high wooden paling, much overgrown with ivy.

"That will do, Liza," said the elderly woman, who seemed to be directing the operations. "We haven't left a grain of dust in them cushions. Time's running on, and I must look to my dinner. Carry in the chairs. I see Mrs. Grey is in the drawing-room; she will tell you how to fix them."

As she spoke, a tall, graceful, girlish-looking woman stepped out upon the grass.

"I am sure you have made these things look quite

fresh," she exclaimed, smiling pleasantly. "We will put them in their places now. I have finished the flowers, so the room will be quite ready in a few minutes."

"Then I'll go to the kitchen, mum; it's time I began the dinner."

"Yes, Mrs. Cox. Hurry ruins cooking, I have heard you say."

"That it does! But the soup is ready for one thing." And they each went their ways.

An hour later and the cause of this preparation revealed itself. A cab with a portmanteau on the top drove up; a loud ring succeeded. The stout servant ran to open the gate; Mrs. Cox dropped her kitchen apron and went to the door. The driver, evidently mollified by receiving more than his full fare, assisted the girl to take down and carry in the portmanteau; and the gentleman, whose coming was so important an event, gave a friendly nod and civil "Hope all's well, Mrs. Cox," as he passed that respectable party and went on swiftly to the beautified drawing-room and closed the door.

Here we must not follow him, nor allow our sacrilegious eyes to watch the rapturous embrace in which he enfolded the fair woman who awaited him and returned kisses as warm, though, perhaps, more tender, than those she received.

"And you are well!" holding her away that he might the better look into her sweet, frank eyes, which seemed grey to some, and brown to others. "Quite, quite well. Why do you tremble? You are sure you are *quite* well?"

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"The joy of hearing you were coming so unexpectedly soon, this morning, set my heart beating, and it will not be quiet," she whispered.

"Heavens! I wonder I can stay away as long as I do from so sweet, so fair a wife! But the more I deny myself, the sooner our time of trial will be over, and we will establish ourselves with fairly well-lined pockets in the most orthodox fashion."

"You have not asked for baby," she said, with a tinge of reproach.

"I confess I cannot spare her a thought when you are in my arms, darling!"

He was a charming lover, young, good-looking, dark-eyed, with a well-knit figure, a pleasant, expressive voice, and an indescribable air and tone of authority and decision.

The first raptures over, the husband and wife sat down to a familiar chat about the small events which the latter had missed out of her copious letters.

"You are well-named, sweetest," said Grey, "for you are constant, above all, in contentment, though for the present I am obliged to condemn you to such a dull, solitary life. Ah, I will yet make amends!"

"You ought to be afraid to start me on a course of gaieties after this long fast!" she said, laughing and smoothing back her reddish golden hair, which was disordered where her head had lain against his shoulder. "I do long for a swinging waltz once more, to the 'Tausend und ein Nacht.' There is no waltz like it."

"None!" he returned, emphatically; and they both

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smiled, as if some very delightful memory was awakened by the mention of it.

"Why, Constance, you too have forgotten baby!"

"I am ashamed of myself! Yes, I have, and it's your fault. You cruel and unnatural *parent*!"

"It is a triumph for me! I am quite aware that I have a most formidable rival in my daughter."

"I will fetch her this moment," cried the mother, and ran out of the room before he could intercept her.

Then the usual scene was enacted, the *tableau* of monsieur, madame, and bébé; only the particular baby we describe was evidently very much a stranger to "papa," and rather given to seek refuge in "mother's arms."

"She will be a pretty little creature," said Grey, looking curiously at her. "She has your eyes and hair; well, thank God for that! A plain woman is an awful affliction."

"But a good woman, dear——"

"Is nowhere in the race of life compared to a wicked, pretty one! Your great drawback, my sweet, is that you are a great deal too good. However, thank Heaven you are not *all* raspberry jam!"

"Shall I try to be devilish?"

"No, I should never be able to tear myself away if you did!"

"What a bribe!" returned the wife. "Come, dear, you must dress; dinner will soon be ready. You'll find Mrs. Cox and I have contrived a dear little dining-room. You know the small den she had for herself? Well, she has given it up and persuaded her

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landlord to make a sort of addition, a square projecting window. You'll see how nice it is. She is such a good soul!"

"We pay her a very good rent, and the house would not suit everyone. But I am glad you contrived a dining-room; it is horrid to sit the whole evening in an atmosphere of dinner."

When that dainty meal, which, though cooked in a lodging-house, was toothsome and well-served, was over, and baby seen safely in bed and asleep, Mrs. Grey rejoined her husband, who was smoking a fragrant cigar beside the open window.

"Are you very tired?" she asked, pausing beside the easy chair, where he sat in a state of luxurious repose, and smoothing back his thick, fine, dark hair.

"No, I cannot say I am. I am in a delicious condition of laziness. It is heavenly to be at home again. I have been a long time away this turn."

"Three months and five days," returned his wife, promptly.

"And have you been very desolate?"

She did not reply at once. A quick, deep sigh heaved her bosom, but her tone was cheerful as she answered:

"Oh, pretty bad. But what with baby and that delightful piano you sent me I got on wonderfully well."

"Play something, dear. I am thankful the baby hasn't banished the piano."

"I assure you baby is quite a connoisseur. There are airs which enchant her and others which make her kick and scream."

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"Come now, that's a flight of imagination. By the way, what have you called this important atom?"

"My dear Bertie! How can you forget the name of your sweet little daughter?"

"Because I think so much of her still sweeter mother. Play something, darling."

She obeyed, and, after wandering over the keys for a few minutes with a delightful, practised touch, she glided into the "Abendsternlied."

He listened with profound attention, enjoying the freshness of the dewy evening, the odour of the grass and flowers.

"Bravo! Bravo!" he murmured. "Exquisite. You must have worked hard while I was away. I don't think I ever heard you play so well. Really, women are much harder workers than men."

"I like to keep up my music. It may be useful to us both. I know that you are ambitious, Bertie, and have visions of success and wealth, but I am not of such a soaring nature, and I like to make sure of what little capital I possess."

"Aha, sceptic! I know you are a little jealous of my reticence. But, Constance, when my plans—my schemes, if you will—are mixed up with the destinies of individuals, nay, nationalities, can I keep silence too rigidly? Trust me and be patient. The day is not far off when you shall know everything and give me plenary absolution. Now, I have a delightful plot in my mind. No, dear, not a third cigar. 'Moderation in all things' (except your kisses) as the Apostle, or some Apostle, says. Here, love, light the lamp. Oh, I ought to do it myself, but indulge

me to-night. There's a railway map about, isn't there?"

"Yes. I have all the maps and railway books on this *étagère*."

"What a methodical witch! Well, I am going to propose that, as I am to have a month's holiday, and there is some promise of fine weather, that you and I run away together. There is a little nook on the coast of Carnarvonshire where I once spent a few delightful weeks when I was at college and full of dreams. Let us run away there and escape from everyone."

"What a delightful idea, Bertie! But won't it cost a great deal? And these rooms? I should not like to lose them."

"No, nor I. So I shall keep them on. Make your mind easy, my precious economist. Trust me not to outrun the constable."

"Oh, yes, I do. But my poor father and I had such a hard fight of it——"

"Think only of joy to-night, my soul. Then, can you start the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, quite well. In fact, if you keep on these rooms I have only to put up a few clothes and books. So we can go when you choose."

"What, to-morrow?"

"Why not? I wonder what baby will say to the sea."

"Baby? Why, you are not going to take the infant?"

Constance hesitated. She was a most loving mother, but her love did not quite overpower her

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common sense, which enabled her to see that possibly her husband might like to have her all to himself.

"You surely might leave the child with her young nurse under Mrs. Cox's supervision. The old dame seems devoted to our young lady."

"Well, yes. I do not think little Kitty could come to much harm under Mrs. Cox's care," she said, reflectively. "I'll settle all about it, but I would rather start the day after to-morrow."

"All right, my most gracious queen! When we return I shall devote my mind to learn all the fascinations of my adorable daughter."

"You will soon discover them, Bertie. She is so intelligent, and so like you."

"Don't you think she would produce a greater effect on me if she were like you?"

"No flattery, sir, at the expense of my daughter."

"Do you think you can manage to ride a Welsh pony, Constance?"

"Yes, of course. Do you forget our expedition to the Pyrenees?"

"Forget!" he exclaimed, with a look and accent which brought the vivid colour to her cheek, though it was more than two years since she had become his wedded wife.

So thoughtless, if fearless, of the future, they arranged their plan for a second honeymoon.

To Constance life was too lovely, too full of happy memories and delicious anticipations. Had ever woman so delightful a lover? Affection such as his might indeed be trusted! What could shake an attachment founded not only on the union of hearts

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but the similarity of tastes and interests, companionship of the highest order? Could she but be able to impress her husband with a sense of her own trustworthiness, so that he would confide the true story of his life and pursuits to her, there would be nothing else left to wish for! Well, that would come yet—as most things had done.

## CHAPTER V.

MRS. PINNOCK's pleasant anticipations of an interesting, youthful inmate, who would cheer her up and arrest the progress of a sort of numb stagnation which, in spite of her devotion to her duties and her never-ceasing labour to keep the house clean, would steal over the good woman's spirit, were doomed to disappointment. Indeed, the presence of the young visitor seemed to add several degrees of intensity to the gloom of Mr. Ardell's abode.

By the time Madge had been ten days her grandfather's guest his housekeeper was seriously alarmed about her mental and physical condition. She seemed to be sinking into a kind of lethargy. She rarely spoke; she scarcely ate. She had opened her big box and tumbled out a few miscellaneous articles which lay on the floor and hung over its sides, but got no further with her unpacking. She either stood gazing out of the window vacantly, on that most deplorable of all views, a smutty, smoke-dried London garden, or sat with her elbows on the table and her chin supported on her hands, her big brown eyes tearless and wide open.

She had some sense of duty, Mrs. Pinnock thought, for she made an attempt to put her room in order every morning. "But she just throws the bed-clothes back; it never comes to her to turn the mattress. I sometimes think my poor master isn't quite right in the upper storey; anyway, I can manage

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him. But to be in the house with two lunatics is more than I could stand. I don't like meddling with what doesn't concern me, but I must speak to her."

The next morning when Mrs. Pinnock brought breakfast to the object of her solicitude in the big, gaunt front parlour or dining-room, she put her intention into execution.

"I'm afraid you didn't sleep well last night, Miss Margaret?"

"Who? Me?" she replied, with a start. "No, I never sleep well now. Why do you ask?"

"You are looking so white and poorly. Of course, it's a dull sort of a place at present, but if you'd try and do something, maybe you'd sleep a bit better. Just try and unpack, and put your things tidy. There's a fine wardrobe and a big chest of drawers; room for lots of things. And if you sit day after day with your hands before you, why—why you'll go mad."

"I *am* going mad!" replied Margaret, with great composure. "I am helpless and hopeless, and the sooner they lock me up and finish me off the better. What is the use of living if I'm to do my living in this brick grave? I knew I should hate my grandfather, but I did *not* think he would be so horrid."

"Oh, miss, excuse me, but just think how much better off you are than many a poor girl. You have a good roof over your head, and your meals regular—though they ain't very grand—a good bed to lie upon and clothes to wear."

"Yes, for a couple of months, perhaps. Where I shall find covering after I cannot think. My grand-

## The Yellow Fiend 39

father will not give me pin-money, I imagine; and, Mrs. Pinnock, don't you know that neither man nor woman can live by bread alone? That's in the Bible, so you must believe it. I told them in Paris that I knew I could never live here. They talked a quantity of nonsense about being under my grandfather's protection and in my right place. I don't want his protection. I can take care of myself, and I hate this cold, dark, ugly place. You say it's fine weather; I cannot see the fineness."

"Well, miss, I'm sure I *am* sorry for you, for it's a dull, miserable house, but being idle won't help you."

"Idle! Why, it's because I've nothing to do and there is nothing worth doing that I am ready to put an end to myself. I was never idle in my life. I wish you'd scold me and abuse me. It would be exhilarating to abuse you back."

"Lor, miss, that would be a funny way of cheering you up!" cried Mrs. Pinnock, smiling good-naturedly. "Come now, like a dear, set to work, unpack your clothes and lay them away. Look here, there's cold meat for lunch, and Mr. Ardell is going out for most of the day, so I'll come and help you. I'd like to see all your nice things."

"My nice things!" she laughed. "Oh, you shall see them. But you are very kind and I am rather a savage. Yet if you were not here—well, I should go mad all the sooner. So if you care to help me I will unpack, especially if you will do me one favour."

"I am sure I will if I can."

"Let me dine in the kitchen with you. I know

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Mr. Ardell will not dine in the *salle à manger*, because the sight of me makes him sick. He has just the same effect on me. I shall be able to eat if I can do so safe downstairs."

"Very well, miss, you shall have your dinner in the kitchen if you don't mind the likes of me alongside of you."

"Of course I don't. Please give me another cup of tea and a slice of brown bread. You see, I am eating quite a good breakfast because you are talking to me and scolding me."

"Scolding! Why, bless your heart, *I ain't* scolding you."

Thus began the friendship which later on grew warm and fast between Mrs. Pinnock and her master's grandchild.

Mrs. Pinnock found the morning pass rapidly in a delightful fashion, for her new young friend was on the whole communicative enough respecting the various possessions packed in her big black box; and by the time the contents had been transferred to the wardrobe and chest of drawers, the housekeeper had gathered a tolerable notion of the life Margaret Ardell had led, both in Germany and in Paris. It certainly did not seem to have been an idle one.

"You are right," said the young lady, as she threw a tangle of cord and labels on to a lot of tattered paper. "I feel much better because I have been up and doing."

"Of course you do, miss. But you needn't throw away that cord, all the same. If I didn't keep every scrap of twine and string that came into the house

## The Yellow Fiend 41

I'd never have an inch to tie up anything. Please hand me them pieces."

Madge obeyed.

"How long have you lived with Mr. Ardell?" she asked, suddenly, sitting down in a stiff, straight, oak armchair and gazing at the housekeeper with a look of profound contemplation, as if she were analysing her character.

"Close on twelve years, miss."

"Twelve years! Oh, my God! And you are alive!" cried the young lady, in a voice expressive of incredulity. "I daresay the years seemed twelve, but they cannot be so many. Don't you hate him?"

"Well, indeed, I do not. I am more sorry for him. There's something about Mr. Ardell I can't help liking. I am sure he hadn't a bad heart to begin with."

"What has he done with it, then? I'd like to know. It would be a good thing to be able to get rid of a heart when it is tiresome."

"I'm not so sure of that, miss. It's not easy to get it back again. I believe there isn't a miserabler man in all this big London than Mr. Ardell."

"I hope so," said Madge, composedly. "He behaved like a brute to me."

"Oh, my dear, don't speak so hard. God knows what he has gone through."

"How did you come to live here?" asked Madge, point blank. "I want to know all about you, if you don't mind. You seem such a wonderful woman to me."

"Bless your heart, my dear, there's nothing wonderful about me," and Mrs. Pinnock laughed.

"Hush!" said the girl, reprovingly. "It is uncanny to hear laughter in this house."

"Well, now, that's what my boy says."

"Have you a boy?"

"Yes, as dear a son as ever lived. It's all along of him that I come here."

"Tell me how it came about, and sit down. You must be terribly tired with standing. Do you never sit down?"

"Not often, miss."

"Do sit down," and Madge rose to fetch a chair.

"Oh, dear, don't trouble for me," returned Mrs. Pinnock, delighted, as the most unselfish are, to talk about self.

"You see, my poor husband was a deal better educated than me, and most respectable in every way. He was a cabinet-maker by trade, and employed constant by a big firm, never a day out of work. One of the gentlemen—a partner, I think—told me after he was dead and gone, that he was a real hartist. Well, he was steady and sober, and we did well and saved money. When my George was about twelve and getting on well at school, my husband got a bad throat. I was awful uneasy. It seemed to me from the first he was to be took. Well, it turned to diphtheria, and that soon finished him. Ah, I'd have died if I hadn't had my boy. You must know, miss, George had set his heart on being a sailor, and father had him educated so far for the merchant service. And Mr. Palmer, the head part-

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ner in the house where he worked, offered to take care of the boy's training, and I begged him to get me work, so as I might keep our little savings for my George. Well, he did get me a place as house-keeper with a rich old lady, who was rather silly—not all there, you know. But before two years was over she died. Then her lawyers were Mr. Ardell's, and because I had managed well and economically they almost *made* me come here. It seems they had some trouble to keep Mr. Ardell from starving himself, and so they somehow got him to take me. We didn't get on bad from the first, but one day I saw something in the papers about a building society. It was broken up, I remember. Now, my poor husband had left me a hundred pounds in just such another society, and I took fright and made so bold as to tell Mr. Ardell and ask his advice. My dear, from that hour he was like a father to me. He nearly went into a fit to think I had so much money in such a rotten concern. He got it out and had it put into something ever so much safer. He seemed to think me a superior sort of person, and did nearly all I asked him. He loves to get a trifle of my savings to put away for me, and once he does it's like drawing blood to get it out of his hands."

"Ah!" ejaculated Madge. "Does he keep it for himself?"

"Oh, bless your heart, no, miss! I'd trust him with untold gold. But he is queer like. He loves the look and the touch of the gold, and he gets worse about it. We have been quite friends ever since he knew I had a bit of money, not that we don't quar-

rel many a time. He speaks desperate rough to me sometimes, but I never let it pass—never! Ah, it's a grand thing having a trifle of money put away. Why, Mr. Ardell gives me ten pounds a year more than he would to anyone else, because he knows I wouldn't be penniless if I left him to-morrow."

"You are right," said Madge. "Oh, how right!" She stopped and thought a moment. Then pulled forth a shabby portmanteau, opened it, and, taking out some coins, laid them deliberately before her on the table—three English sovereigns and a half, three shillings, some pennies, and a little French silver.

"There," she went on, in a low voice, "that's all I have in the world, all that was left when the doctor was paid and the rent and my studio fees, and oh! lots of things. I wouldn't have even that if Mr. Caldecott had not paid my journey here and Mrs. Caldecott hadn't given me mourning. It is astonishing how good people are sometimes. There was my aunt—oh, I cannot speak of her, for *I* was not good to her. I gave her lots of trouble. I was a selfish, ill-tempered, heartless little brute! I hate myself when I look back and think. *She* wasn't an angel, but, oh, I wish she had known how well I loved her! Here, I will shew you a sketch of her. This is a horrid thing, but it has a look of her."

She sprang to the drawers and took out a roll of various sized cardboard and sheets of paper, which she scattered recklessly on the floor as she sought out one. It was a very rough pencil drawing of a woman's head, a plain, strong face, with a wistful, kindly look about the brow and eyes. The mouth

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and chin a little too heavy, the head and neck well placed. She wore a lace cap with long ends and had an air of some distinction.

"Dear, dear! Did you do that, miss?" asked Mrs. Pinnock, with sincere admiration. "It is just wonderful, so natural, as if she was going to speak to you."

"I wish she could speak to me once more. My God! How I wish she could!" murmured the desolate young creature.

Mrs. Pinnock looked at her compassionately, while she thought: "What a heathenish lot she must have been brought up amongst to have 'My God' on her lips at every turn."

Madge was slowly rolling up the sheet of paper, her eyes and thoughts far away. When she had replaced it in the drawer she sauntered back to the window, where she stood for a few moments in silence, Mrs. Pinnock busying herself in re-making the bed, which, to say the truth, was very untidy.

"Why do you do that over again?" asked Madge, suddenly and impatiently.

"You see, my dear young lady, you are not accustomed to such work, and you don't manage it quite right, so I thought——"

"Yes, I am well accustomed to all sorts of work. We never kept a servant, but I am not tidy, and I don't care how anything is or anything looks. I am so miserable that I do not care to live, but—but since I have talked to you I feel a little better. I even care to get away. But what can I do?"

"Aye, that's just it. I suppose you can speak

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many languages and play the piano and all that. But lor, miss, it's wretched poor pay the best teachers get."

"I know. I have done some teaching and I hate it. I don't like children—troublesome, tiresome little wretches. I did dream of being an artist."

"I'm sure, miss, you draw quite beautiful."

"Oh, I am a mere beginner, and yet I have been working four years. I might teach quite little children, but I want so much teaching myself. That costs money. Then the paper and pencils and pastels, and after, the canvas and colours. Oh, it's all a giant despair."

She sat down and covered her face with her hands.

"Lor, my dear, don't you be so downhearted. We'll try and find some way out of your trouble. And now I must go away downstairs, my whole morning's gone. I'll ring the bell when dinner is ready."

"Mind you do not trouble to put it in the dining-room. I will come down and eat in the kitchen with you. Yes, I will. I would like it better. And, Mrs. Pinnock, pray tell Mr. Ardell that I am quite sure he dines in his room to avoid me, so I prefer keeping with you to keeping him out of his own dining-room. Perhaps you might add that I should like to earn my own bread. But there, I have kept you too long."

So Mrs. Pinnock departed.

Mr. Ardell took very little notice of his granddaughter's message. However, he accepted her sug-

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gestion; for each day, as soon as Mrs. Pinnock informed him that dinner was ready, he rose and walked into the front parlour or dining-room, seeming to have forgotten his grandchild's presence in the house.

As to Madge Ardell, the enormous, subtle power of habit was slowly exercising its influence upon her. Her intermittent talk with Mrs. Pinnock was a source of comfort, though sometimes the hopelessness of her outlook admitted of none. Occasionally she sought relief in work, and though not especially sympathetic in manner, her humble friend soon discovered that she was really pleased to help her in household matters.

Mr. Ardell was often out in fine weather. His curious, dreamy, wistful face, his bent, shabby-genteel figure was well known to the loiterers who haunted the Law Courts.

Bred to the law in a youth which was full of promise the only interest left to him in life was centred in legal proceedings, and when any important case was going on he was sure to be seen in a good position for viewing the court and hearing the pleadings.

Once he was safe out of the house Madge took possession of the front parlour, and tried to sketch even the chairs and tables and an old cabinet. Mrs. Pinnock, indeed, was always ready to unlock the book-case for her; but the dusty old tomes were not very attractive, and Madge was not particularly fond of reading. So, having found that the room had a north light, she amused herself as best she

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could with her pencil, or, if the mood took her, in remodelling sundry of her late aunt's garments.

"You must have tea with me this afternoon," said Madge to her new friend one warm June day, as they sat in the kitchen, waiting to hear the front door close when the master of the house went out after his early dinner. "The front room is cool and pleasant, and, Mrs. Pinnock, I want you to sit to me. I know you are not very busy, so you might take Mr. Ardell's paper and sit for a while."

"Oh, my dear, what can you make of an ugly old woman like me?"

"I would rather sketch your face than many a pretty woman's. But you will sit?"

Mrs. Pinnock agreed, well pleased.

"Talking of pictures," she said, "I must shew you my son's photograph. He favours his father more than me—so much the better for him."

She drew forth her big bunch of keys and unlocked a small cupboard of dark wood with ornamental brass lock and decorations—her own property, of which she was rather proud—and took out a large photo in a gorgeous frame.

Madge looked at it attentively, and said, in a thoughtful tone:

"It is a good face. A man ought to go far with a face like that. He looks as if he knew his own mind, and could say 'No.' So many more men, and women, too, are ready to say 'Yes' where 'No' would be better. It is a successful face. He'll probably make money."

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"Why, miss, you speak like a fortune-teller!"

"The girls at my school used to think so, and were always worrying me to tell their fortunes, but I don't believe in my own gift or in anyone's gift——" She paused, then handed back the portrait to the smiling mother, saying in a meditative way: "I like men."

"So do most young ladies, miss, but they don't say so."

"Why should they not? It is not wrong to like them. They are such a variety, so different from us. They amuse me more. Then no woman has ever painted as a man can—a real artist man. Oh, how I envy them their gift of power! They may not be as kind or good as we are, but still I like them best. There!" interrupting herself, as the sound of a heavy door closing was heard. "He is gone. How nice it is to feel that he is gone." She drew a deep breath.

"And what a pity he does not try to make you love him," sighed the housekeeper.

Madge's reply was a hard little laugh. She gathered up her drawing materials and prepared to go upstairs, when both were startled by a loud peal on the visitors' bell.

"It is the post, perhaps. I'll go," said Madge, "and you come soon, please, Mrs. Pinnock."

She ascended quickly, laid her parcel on the hall table, and opened the door.

A gentleman—a very good-looking, well-dressed, interesting sort of man—stood outside. He turned

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at the sound of the opening door, and, having stared for a moment with immense surprise at the quaint little figure which presented itself, he asked:

"Is Mr. Ardell at home?"

"He has just gone out."

"I am unfortunate. Pray give him my card." He handed it to her, and she read the inscription: H. Cecil Brook. "Stay," he added, "may I come in and write him a line?"

Madge answered by opening the door wider. "You had better come into the dining-room," she said.

## CHAPTER VI.

"THANK you very much," returned Brook, stepping into the hall, and then following her into the front room.

He was greatly puzzled. She was evidently in mourning, but over her black dress a huge apron of coloured print was tied and wrapped to keep it from getting under her feet, giving her the air of a nineteenth century mummy. Her thick, short, wavy hair was exceedingly untidy, and from under it her big, brown, sad eyes looked out upon the stranger with a questioning expression as if she studied him in a suspicious mood.

Very deliberately, and with the greatest composure, she looked for and found a dusty old blotting-book, with some half-sheets of paper and a huge ink-bottle with a tiny puddle of ink at the bottom. She set them before Brook, but a pen was nowhere to be found.

"I don't like to go into Mr. Ardell's room for one."

"Pray do not trouble yourself. We men of business are generally provided against these emergencies." He drew forth a silver holder containing both pen and pencil.

"That is very useful," observed Madge, looking at it curiously.

Who could this girl be? As far as dress and appearance went, she might be a little slavey hired at half a crown a week and her food, to assist the

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housekeeper. But her peculiarly sweet, refined voice, with its touch of foreign accent, her perfect self-possession, which was absolutely free from boldness or presumption, seemed to stamp her with the *cachet* of a lady.

Brook wrote his note, while Madge moved softly to and fro, carrying in her hand her drawing materials from the hall.

The note was soon finished, and Brook, shutting up his pencil-case, rose, saying: "Many apologies for giving you this trouble."

She paused by the table, and pressing the points of her extremely long, delicately-shaped, but, alas! grubby fingers, upon it, looked up from under her tangled hair with a smile so sweet and arch, and shewing such white, small, regular teeth, that Brook felt he must find out something about her.

"I never saw you here before! Are you the housekeeper's daughter?"

She shook her head, and grew grave again, as she replied: "I wish I were!"

"Her assistant, then?" and Brook's expressive blue eyes told her that she was intended by nature for a much more exalted position.

"I am Mr. Ardell's granddaughter."

"Great powers! Is it possible he has a granddaughter?" cried Brook.

"It seems odd, doesn't it?" said Madge.

"Inexplicable! And are you to be incarcerated in this living tomb?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! It is too bad! Shall I try to deliver the imprisoned Princess from durance vile?"

"I wish you could. But, of course, no one can. Now, I suppose you wish this note given to Mr. Ardell?"

"If you will be so good."

"I will do so." She bent her head. Brook hesitated. He wanted to ask more questions, but he saw he ought to consider himself dismissed.

"Shall you tell your grandfather that I came in and wrote a note?"

"Mrs. Pinnock will. I never speak to him."

"Poor old fellow! Rather hard lines for him!"

Madge shook her head, and tossed up her little chin with a despairing gesture.

"He doesn't care!" Then a brief pause and another arch smile. "Good-morning, Mr. Brook. Perhaps I have said too much to a stranger."

"I am no stranger to Mr. Ardell; and perhaps some day you may find me not unworthy of confidence."

"That sounds very nice; at all events, good-morning."

Brook bowed himself out, and Madge, going to see that the door was securely fastened, almost ran into Mrs. Pinnock's arms as she was coming rapidly into the room.

"Why, who was it as stayed here so long?" cried Mrs. Pinnock, in a tone of some uneasiness.

"That gentleman," handing the card to her.

"Oh, Mr. Brook! He is all right."

"He asked leave to write a note. Then he took me for your daughter! So I told him who I was. He seemed greatly astonished."

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"I hope you said nothing against your grandfather, Miss Margaret. It would not do if people betrayed you to him."

"I certainly did not say much *for* him. But, how handsome Mr. Brook is! Are there many Englishmen like him? I have seen very few. It is pleasant to live among beautiful people, though I am an ugly duckling myself."

"Yes, he is a nice, civil-spoken gentleman. I fancy he must be rich, for the master likes to see him come in to call. So maybe you'll see him again."

"I hope so," said Madge, and kept silence for a minute. Then she proceeded to put out her drawing materials, next to place her model, all in silence.

It required some ingenuity to supply deficiencies, but at last all was arranged, and saying: "Look at me," Madge began.

The minutes passed by slowly. The street was very quiet; the afternoon was very warm. The flies buzzed, and suddenly Madge exclaimed in a low, but awful tone:

"Mrs. Pinnock, you are asleep!"

"Well, indeed, miss, I must confess I was! I am that ashamed, and you making so much of me! But, you see, I am pretty busy all the morning, and I do seem to want forty winks after my dinner."

"I daresay you do. Now, rouse yourself, and come and see what I have done so far."

Mrs. Pinnock rubbed her eyes, and obeyed. She stood looking over the artist's shoulder for some moments without speaking. Then, with an air of reluctant candour, she exclaimed: "Well, I did *not* think I was such an ugly old woman!"

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"It is very like you," returned Madge, uncompromisingly, "but *I* don't think it ugly. It's a good, strong, sensible face, far better than a pretty dolly one. Dollies grow old ever so much sooner than the plain, sensible women!"

"Anyhow, plain or not, my face didn't prevent my getting a dear good husband, as real a gentleman as the best lord in the land—though he was but a working cabinet-maker! If it had pleased God to leave him with me, life would have been too good."

"Do you think God took him on purpose?" asked Madge, beginning to put away her drawing materials.

"Oh, my dear, who can answer that? These things are past finding out."

"I should think they were!" rejoined Madge, emphatically.

Mrs. Pinnock applied the corner of her apron to her eyes, and then resumed her rather rueful gaze at her own portrait, when the tranquillity of artist and critic was suddenly broken up by an exclamation from Madge:

"Oh, Mrs. Pinnock, here is Mr. Ardell! He is crossing the street. I thought you said he would not be back till late?"

"I was sure of it," said Mrs. Pinnock, apologetically, with an affrighted look through the window. "Dear, dear, how tired he seems!"

"I hope you don't give him a latch-key!" cried Madge, scrambling her things together.

"Don't you trouble, my dear! Surely you have a right to sit in your own grandfather's dining-room."

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"Wait," returned Madge, "here he is; he *has* a latch-key!" as the door slammed.

The next moment Mr. Ardell entered and stood as if transfixed. Then his deep-set, hollow eyes lit up with the fire of unrestrained fury.

"How dare you come in here and scatter your dusty trash about my tables and chairs?" he cried, in a shrill, strained voice, that sounded as if his anger was too much for his strength.

He swooped down on the table, and, seizing the drawing with his long, clawlike fingers, was beginning to crush it when Madge, to Mrs. Pinnock's surprise and dismay, pounced upon him, and, with more strength than could have been expected from her long, slender hands, forcibly opened his closed claws.

"You shall *not* spoil my work!" she cried, with nearly as much anger as his own. "I don't want to come into your miserable, melancholy dining-room. I will stay in the kitchen. If you would only help me to learn for a little while longer, I could earn my own living, and pay you back what I cost. Look"—smoothing out the crumpled paper—"do you see who that is meant for? Another year's hard work, and I might begin to earn a little money."

"Take her away—take her away!" said her astonished grandfather, dropping into a chair and gazing at her with an expression of dislike, not untinged with fear.

"Come away, Miss Madge; you have quite upset your grandpapa."

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"He looks awfully white! Shall I run for some water?" asked Madge, repentantly.

"Yes, do. There's a jug of water in the larder. Fill a tumbler from that."

Madge flew to fetch it. Mr. Ardell's eyes followed her with an evil look.

"A young tiger cat!" he muttered. "I'll go and tell Briggs the sort of inmate he persuaded me to open my doors to! She is a vengeance—a real vengeance! And in all her fury I saw another's face—another's face in hers!"

"Of course, the poor young lady was vexed to see you going to tear up her beautiful drawing. Many an old gentleman would be pleased to have a nice young granddaughter to sit beside him and make elegant——"

"Here's some nice cold water," cried Madge, reappearing. "I am sorry I was so rough, but I was vexed to see you going to tear up the only bit of work I have attempted all through this melancholy, unhappy month since I came."

Mr. Ardell drank the water greedily; then looking straight into her eyes, said, slowly: "Go away."

"Yes, with pleasure! If you will listen to what I have to say and do what I ask, you might get rid of me at little or no cost. Just let me talk to you once, and I will not come near you any more."

"You are telling lies! Take her away!"—to his sorely distressed housekeeper.

Madge closed her lips as if she never intended to open them again, swept her goods and chattels together, and hurried from the room.

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"A devil—a dangerous little devil—and—the bills, Pinnock, the bills! You did not shew them to me last week. They are mounting up—I feel they are! You are under her influence. You are deceiving me! She is another manifestation of the fiend."

"Now, Mr. Ardell, sir, if I didn't know you were a bit off your head now and again, from worriting over old troubles, I'd be downright angry at your insinuations! You shall see the books this moment; they are all in the house. As if a poor child that doesn't eat an ounce of meat in two days would make three shillings difference on the whole week!"

"Shew them to me!" ejaculated her master, rising slowly. "I will go into my room, and—give me my dressing-gown."

"I had nigh forgot, sir! Mr. Brook was here. He came in and wrote a line for you. Here it is."

Mr. Ardell snatched it from her hand and tore it open. As he read, a pleased smile overspread his face.

"Clever young fellow—shrewd, capable. What did he say?"

"It was Miss Ardell opened the door to him, and gave him pen and ink."

"Strange—very strange! Is it Fate, or—But I must see the books, all the same. I must not allow myself to be hoodwinked. Go and get the books."

Mrs. Pinnock, whose long-practised tact told her almost unfailingly when to yield and when to resist, simply said:

"Very well, sir," and left the room to seek them.

## CHAPTER VII.

MR. ARDELL looked round with an angry glare, as if seeking some trace of his offending granddaughter or her work, but finding none, went into his bedroom, and unlocked and opened his bureau.

He seated himself before it, prepared to exercise the utmost scrutiny into the expenditure of his right-hand woman, who soon reappeared with three or four small account books and some scraps of paper. All these she placed upon the bureau, and he pounced upon them eagerly.

The reader shall be spared the torments of this investigation. How the old man compared the cost of various weeks at distant dates, his running comments on the enormous expense of different items, his adding and dividing and estimating, till Mrs. Pinnock felt that the water-jug was *too* temptingly handy.

At last he leant back in his chair with a deep sigh of disappointment, for the remarkable equality of Mrs. Pinnock's expenditure over a period of quite twelve months forbade the possibility of fault-finding. Moreover, like many suspicious people, when he accepted anyone as reliable, he trusted that individual completely. It was a fit of anger which incited him to this raid on the books, not any serious doubt of his housekeeper's honesty.

Long experience had developed a high opinion of her capabilities; and, having been nursed by her with infinite care through a bad attack of bronchitis,

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and finding on his recovery that her expenditure had not exceeded what he considered it ought to have been, he actually made up his mind to give her a monthly sum to keep the house and set him free from all care on this head.

"Well, sir, I hope you are satisfied?" asked Mrs. Pinnock, drily.

"I always believe you are a sensible woman," he returned, coldly, "but as I have been forced to accept another inmate I was naturally anxious to see to what additional cost I was put. I see it is a little over three-and-sixpence a week; that is to say, about ten pounds a year—a large sum to be robbed of for a person who has really no claim upon me, in spite of all Briggs preached about blood ties and the punishment I should draw down upon my head if I rejected her. Well, keep to this scale of outlay, Mrs. Pinnock, do not drift into luxuries. Had you ever seen, as I have, a creature dying by inches for want of necessaries," continued the old man, in a trembling voice, "you would abhor luxuries; aye, abhor them!"

"I am the last woman in the world to want or wish for luxuries; but as we are talking of money and outlay I must warn you, sir, that Miss Margaret will want more than meat and drink. She is not to say bad off for clothes at the present, but in a few months she'll want some new things, and all the money she has at this moment is three pounds ten."

"Three pounds ten!" repeated Mr. Ardell, tremulously. "Make her give it to you, and I—I will keep it for her. Young people are so careless, nay, reckless. It will be safer with me."

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Mrs. Pinnock looked at him with a slight smile. "Well, sir, I'd rather *you* asked her for the money than me. Miss Margaret is a young lady as don't like liberties to be taken. But she won't waste it; she knows its value, I'm pretty sure. Lor, Mr. Ardell, why don't you board her out in some nice school, where she'd find other young girls instead of pining away here alone, and then you'd be saved the vexation of seeing her——"

"And pray," asked the old man, with a cunning look, "where could I find board for her at three-and-sixpence a week, eh?"

"Oh, for that matter——" Mrs. Pinnock was beginning, when Mr. Ardell, turning from her hastily, set out paper and ink.

"There, there," he said, "I have talked myself sick. Go away, my good friend. I've letters to write, important letters. They must be posted by 5.30. Go, go, go!"

Mrs. Pinnock gathered up her books and went.

There was one other person who was honoured by Mr. Ardell's confidence in even a higher degree than Mrs. Pinnock. True that he permitted the head partner of that highly respectable firm of solicitors, Messrs. Briggs and Baker, Lincoln's Inn Fields, to transact his overt business and acknowledged money-making; but there were little hidden rills of profit—subterranean springs of wealth in which his soul delighted, albeit he had to pay for the working, and in these his helpmate and employé was that astute and promising young man, Mr. H. Cecil Brook. He had made Mr. Ardell's acquaintance

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some years before, one very sultry July day, on board a penny boat, when the old man, who was weak from insufficient food, overcome by heat, fainted away. Brook assisted him with kindly good nature (he was quite good-natured in an ordinary way), helped him ashore and into a cab.

Hence arose a friendship, as Brook soon discovered that there was work to do for the old man, which he was well qualified by knowledge, capabilities and surroundings to undertake.

That he would not work for nothing was rather a recommendation than otherwise to Mr. Ardell, and when he began to find that money was almost as highly appreciated by his young friend as by himself, his respect and regard for him increased.

His important letter was addressed to this valued agent, who had lately become junior partner in a well-known firm of general merchants, Joyce Granton and Company, in whose house he had worked as foreign correspondent for a considerable time. He was an excellent linguist, his father, a broken-down gentleman, having been sentenced to honourable exile in a remote consulate by an exasperated family with some parliamentary interest.

Escaping her master's presence the housekeeper hastened in search of the deeply offended Madge, whom she found securely entrenched in her own room; that is, she had locked her door.

"Won't you let me in, Miss Madge?" said Mrs. Pinnock, coaxingly, through the keyhole.

"No! I do not wish to see or speak to anyone. I feel too savage!"

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"Well, I do not mind how bad you are."

"It's no use. I will not open the door to any creature."

"I'll bring you a cup of tea at five o'clock."

"Don't take that trouble."

"I'll bring it, anyhow."

No answer. Mrs. Pinnock listened for an instant. All was still, so she gave up the struggle and retreated downstairs.

Profound indeed was the mingled anger and despondency which wrung Madge's young heart. Her resentment against her grandfather prompted some very evil thoughts indeed. What right had he to trample on her as he did? Why was her existence an offence to him? How was she to deliver herself from the horrible imprisonment to which she had been consigned? What could she do to earn money? All sorts of desperate expedients suggested themselves.

"But before I do anything," mused Madge, as the fire of her fury died out, "I will write to Mrs. Caldecott and ask her if there is any chance of finding employment in Paris. I would go as a servant (what a bad one I should make!) Oh, if I could only go on with my drawing! I wonder if that man who came here to-day, Cecil Brook (it's a nice name) has any influence with Mr. Ardell? I will try and find out. Mrs. Pinnock seems to know something of him. I should not mind testing his half-offer to deliver the 'imprisoned Princess' as he said, in his insolent mockery. A pretty kind of a Princess I should make. How beautifully dressed he was.

So sure of himself, so cool and civil, and, I suppose, contemptuous. But Englishmen are quite unlike all other men. I don't know if I shall like or dislike them. I have rarely spoken to one. Mr. Brook's eyes are charming; I have never seen such dark blue eyes before. I should like to see them again. He has a nice smile, too, but it might be cruel. However, that's nothing to me, if I could only persuade him to help me. I may never see him again. I should be sorry to think that. If I were a man I might have a blood feud with him, and fight a duel with him and wound him. As it is, I should not mind a quarrel with him to prove that I am no poor little grubby slavey, but his equal.

"Am I? No. I am just a tiny bit afraid of him. That is, I am anxious not to be despised by him. That shews I'm a fool! I never felt that about anyone in the world before. Oh, what black hands! I may as well wash them. No, I can do nothing to poor Mrs. Pinnock's face; my queer, hateful old grandfather has done for it. I wish I could paint *him* and all I see *through* him!"

It was barely eleven o'clock next morning when Mr. Ardell's "favoured guest" presented himself.

"I guessed he expected Mr. Brook," was Mrs Pinnock's comment to Madge, when she went upstairs soon after the unwonted sound of the knocker had made itself heard with many reverberations through the half-empty house. "He ate up his breakfast quite fast, and called for his morning coat. I suppose Mr. Brook is so smart and brushed up,

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your grandfather doesn't like to look like an old workhouse Johnnie beside him."

Madge nodded. She was never talkative, but sometimes she was extremely and persistently silent.

The housekeeper, therefore, proceeded to dust and clean the room, producing a brush, dustpan, and a plateful of damp tea-leaves.

"Oh, don't!" cried Madge. There was a touch of anguish in the cry. "Don't clean my room this week. You did it last Thursday. It can't want cleaning so soon again."

"Why, bless your heart, miss, in London——"

"Never mind! I will *not* have it done to-day. I am going to lay out my aunt's gowns, and see which I can use, and which I shall sell, and lots of things. I wish you would leave the place alone! Look here, Mrs. Pinnock, I don't want you to worry about my room at all; I always did it myself when I was at home, so leave it to me. It will spare you a little, and when it wants a real clean—at least when *I* think it wants a real clean—I'll ask you to help me, but you shall not do it to-day."

And Mrs. Pinnock yielded, as she generally did, to the decidedly self-willed young lady.

Meantime the master of the house had settled himself in his cool, gloomy dining-room, arrayed in his threadbare "best," and looking the type of a decayed gentleman. His writing things, rubbed up and in working order, were set forth on the big round dining table; and he himself, *Times* in hand, sat ensconced in a large leathern chair. Into the room Brook soon entered.

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"Pray don't rise, Mr. Ardell," said the younger man, as the old man stood up, rather stiffly.

"I am not so feeble, I assure you; by no means feeble," he replied, holding out his hand with a smile. "I am glad to see you can get out so early as eleven. When *I* was young, nine o'clock was quite a proper hour for a business interview. Now all that's changed—totally changed."

"Yet we work a good deal harder than you did."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so. Well, I should like to know to what I owe the pleasure of seeing you." Ardell could be punctiliously polite when he chose.

"I should not have intruded on you, my dear sir, except on business. I come, in short, to introduce a new client to you, a very sound and unobjectionable man—our worthy principal's second son. He needs a small sum of ready money, and is willing to pay for accommodation."

"Aha! A prodigal son, eh?"

"No, Mr. Ardell, he knows the value of money well enough, but is perhaps a little too eager to grow rich. The fact is, he has been playing on the Stock Exchange, and wants another little pile of counters to go on with the game."

Brook proceeded to explain the state of affairs, and shew Ardell that his friend Joyce was good for two or three thousand pounds—a sum which would more than cover the amount the young speculator wished to borrow.

Ardell listened with profound attention. "It is not then to waste and squander?" he exclaimed. "It

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is to put money in his purse, to earn a little addition to his capital?"

"Just so. His father has, however, an extraordinary dread of speculation, except in very solid concerns—so solid, indeed, that they cease to be speculative. Of course, Mr. Joyce is quite aware that if it became known that a member of the famous firm of Joyce and Granton (and young Joyce virtually *is* a member) was in the stock jobbing swim, it would shake the credit of the house. You don't do much in the stock market yourself, Mr. Ardell?"

"No, I don't. No," said the old man, slowly. "I never was in a hurry to be rich. I have had strange experiences—very strange—and I cannot bear my money, my gold, to be long or far from my touch. I don't like paper, bills, or cheques, or mortgage deeds, or anything but gold—the yellow, golden gold! Yet what *can* we do against the habits of the people we live with, or of the times we live in? Well, Mr. Brook, my candid opinion is that this loan to Joyce, junior, is risky. I don't suppose for a moment his father would allow any trouble to come of it; still that is not real security—you will grant this?"

"Certainly, Mr. Ardell. Nor can you deny that the risk is paid for by the rate of interest."

The discussion was a little prolonged, but finally all was arranged, or Mr. Ardell thought so, when Brook said, with his pleasant smile:

"You don't suppose that I put money in your pocket, and money into Joyce's from motives of pure benevolence, eh?"

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"No, certainly not. Joyce ought to pay a high commission for such important accommodation."

"Just so, my dear sir, and so must you, for the introduction of so valuable a client."

Mr. Ardell looked at him for a moment with a displeased expression. Then a cunning smile overspread his face.

"I never thought you a fool, my young friend. But, of course, I am the accommodating party. I can do without Mr. Joyce."

"But you would do better with him. Moreover, there are other happy possessors of coin who may be less exacting than you are."

"Very few, I imagine," retorted the old man. "Anyhow, you shall have no more than two-and-a-half commission, though in the end, I may—I may——"

He paused. Brook listened eagerly, with downcast eyes, but Mr. Ardell said no more. He heaved a deep sigh, and, drawing a cash-box which he had brought from his bedroom, when he prepared for Brook's visit to him, he unlocked it and took out a cheque-book, proceeding to write the magic characters which were to place fortune within the grasp of Joyce.

## CHAPTER VIII.

BROOK looked on carelessly while Mr. Ardell filled in the cheque with clear, tiny writing, blotting it and reading it over, before handing it across to his visitor, who drew from his note-book a duly executed acknowledgment.

Ardell examined it slowly, then placed it in the cash-box, which he locked with a key attached to his watch-chain. In his turn, Brook looked sharply at the cheque before putting it in his note-book, while he said :

"I fancied you banked with the Edgware and Midland Bank."

"Yes, I do ; but I also keep a little nest-egg at Corbyn, Collins and Bell's. It is better to follow scripture advice, and not let your 'right hand know what your left hand doeth' in money matters. By the way, I want you to oblige me about a little fancy of mine. This bill will fall due this day three months. May I ask you to pay part of the payment, say a hundred and twenty pounds, in gold? It is a little fancy of mine."

"I also finance, my dear sir. I thought you too sound a man not to know the superiority, for purposes of exchange, of paper over bullion!"

Ardell did not reply immediately.

"I know—I know," he said at length. "I have read a library on the subject, but nothing—nothing can wean me from my liking for the touch of the

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yellow metal! Besides, I said—— But you will grant me this little favour, eh, Mr. Brook?"

"Certainly, sir. I'll see to that myself."

"Thank you, thank you," returned the old man, tremulously. "You are gracious to me, and you sometimes make me almost wish I had a son who thought like myself; but this is folly."

"I fear it is. Whether the human field naturally produces successive crops, or follows the law which foresters tell us governs the growth of trees, where one falls and decays, it is never succeeded by one of the same species, men rarely resemble their fathers mentally. By the way, I was agreeably surprised when I called yesterday to see a charming young lady, who told me she was your granddaughter. She will be a pleasant——"

"No, she will be nothing pleasant!" interrupted the old man, fiercely. "She is forced upon me, an intolerable burden, a hideous expense."

"But, Mr. Ardell, a girl is scarcely an expense. A boy, now, who would run up bills and get into scrapes, and——"

"A boy I should kick out of doors! I cannot put a girl away in that fashion. I don't know how Briggs got the better of me. I was obliged to yield. A charming young lady! How can you bring your lips to utter such fulsome stuff? She is ugly, sir, forbidding, untidy, defiant, unwomanly."

"Excuse me," said Brook, laughing, "but I must maintain my opinion. She is a little unpolished—needs training, perhaps—but she is original, and has certainly the making of a strangely attractive

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creature. Have you not noticed her eyes, the graceful turn of her throat, the warm brown of her smooth skin, the suggestiveness of strength and fire that pervades her personality?"

"Words, words, words! You young men have such torrents of words wherein to hide your confused ideas. I see nothing of all this! There was a woman once who was the pattern of all womanhood to me, and she was absolutely unlike this little defiant gipsy they have thrust upon me to eat up my hard-earned bit of money."

"If this is how you look at the matter, it's deuced hard lines for both of you. You had better put the poor child away to school."

"The poor child! I tell you, Brook, she is a creature of evil omen to me. Though the very opposite of my woman—my dream woman, my angel—this granddaughter of mine has an extraordinary look of her—a distracting look of her! I am more and more convinced that an enemy has sent her to torment me."

"My dear Mr. Ardell, this is an unheard-of delusion," said Brook, gravely. "Rather some friend has sent you a source of comfort and interest in your old age."

"That means you think me a madman, eh?" This in a changed voice, and with a changed expression, Brook's gravity warning him back to self-restraint.

"No, by no means! But it is never safe to encourage crotchets."

"Oh, my head is set quite straight upon my shoulders, I assure you. Still, you must admit that

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curious bits of knowledge, gleams of light, come to those who meditate long on special subjects."

Brook checked the contemptuous words which rose to his lips, thinking it might be better to give the old man his head.

"No doubt meditation was one of the high roads to wisdom in bygone days. Now we take an express train to reach the unknown," was Brook's amended sentence.

"You are right, young man. You are more cognisant of truth than most of your contemporaries," said Ardell, thoughtfully, and very quietly. "I think I said just now that I have had strange experiences; and it has been borne in upon me that men rarely know the secret of gold—the real reason why men love it, and strive for it, and die for lack of it."

"The reason is not far to seek, it seems to me. Men strive for gold, and, to use a figure of speech, 'sell their souls' for it, because, given gold, you gain everything the world can give."

"That's not all, not by any means all. There's a life, a spirit of its own, in what's well called the precious metal. It is kind to some and cruel to others. It was both to me, and which mood was most cruel I cannot say. First it was inexorable. Heavens! How hard I worked when I was young, and I was not dull nor incapable. I had an old bachelor relative, who helped me and prophesied great things of me. I was bred to the Bar, and after toiling for some years in loneliness and gloom I got a few briefs. And so I ventured to ask a girl I had

loved for a long time to marry me, and we settled it all. Then I went and told my bachelor relative, hoping he would help me. He cursed me for a fool and turned his back upon me. We married. My wife was delicate. She was wife, servant, mother—all. Her strength ebbed away. I could only give her common food and not too much of that. Gold was against me then; it would not come. It shrank from the grasp of my imploring hands.

"After our baby was born, she faded more and more. She could not touch the best I could give her. I knew it. I grovelled at the feet of the man who might have helped her to live. In vain, so she died. They were obliged to take the useless infant whom no one wanted, whose birth was my misfortune, out of my sight. I never could bear him. And then came the most infernal blow the 'yellow fiend' could have dealt me. My relative died after a short illness. His will had been made ten years before, and never altered or revoked. It bequeathed everything to me—not riches, mind you, barely what most men would call competence. But had I had it eighteen months before—" A long pause followed, which Brook was too well-bred to break, and Ardell resumed:

"Then came a sort of blank, and then I seemed to come to life again. This house, partially furnished, was part of my inheritance, so I came and lived here. I ceased to care for my profession, to succeed in which had been my ambition. I gave myself up to get the mastery over the evil spirit which mocked me. I enjoyed living poorly; I set my soul

to save every farthing. I sold all I could, for gold, my friend, is magnetic. It comes to those who already hold enough to create popular attraction. Once it begins to slip from you every day adds to the negative force, and it flies from you—flies, flies, flies—till you are in the workhouse or die in the nearest ditch.

“So I slowly gathered up two or three threads of wealth, slow, steady investments—and intermittent geysers—in the shape of risky loans, in which, my dear young friend, you have greatly assisted me! But there is always a battle between me and *it*—always. I know the moment I cease to save and struggle *it* will hound me down and strip me naked, and throw me helpless, penniless, a poor, beaten, despised wretch, on the world. My only chance is to heap up riches, even though I know not ‘who shall gather them.’ Do not mock me because I have confessed this, my weakness or my strength, to you, and keep the secret of my knowledge.”

“My dear sir,” in a tone of sincerity, which was not assumed, “I was never more interested! But, excuse me if I say that it would be a great relief to your nerves, and an addition of some years to your life, if you would try to take a more commonplace view of life—to interest yourself in this girl, who would, I am sure, be grateful to you for kindness. After all, she is not to blame for her father’s existence and her own lonely position.”

“Don’t mock me by talking what is called sense! No doubt you laugh at the puerile folly of an old

man's sentimental recollections, but I was young like yourself once."

"I am the last to do so," interrupted Brook, with his attractive smile. "Few men have been more strongly influenced by women than I have been, and probably will be. Beauty is inexpressibly delightful to me, and charm is even more potent. One thing only helps me to hold my ground against the power which both possess, to tempt and to bewilder. It is ambition! That is my Pole-star."

"Then you, *too*, are gripped by the yellow fiend?" exclaimed Ardell, eagerly, his eyes ablaze, as he leant forward and grasped Brook's arm with his clawlike fingers. "We will help each other to gather in the gold, to imprison it in strong safes and secret drawers, where it is secure and cannot escape. But I *do* like to see a goodly pile of golden sovereigns when I am alone—quite alone! They seem hostages from wealth; so you'll get me the hundred pieces of gold? For you, *too*, are fighting with the fiend."

"Yes. But you see I only want gold to spend and use it. Wealth is of no value to me, save as the stepping-stone to power. You see, my dear sir, I can be confidential, too."

"Yes, yes. I rarely talk so much—rarely!" He grew silent and very pale, leaning back in his chair, as if unconscious of Brook's presence. Then he suddenly sat up, exclaiming:

"I don't like her—I cannot. She has a mocking, hateful look of the one I loved best. She is bad—bad, I know she is, bad and bold!"

"Your granddaughter, I presume! Don't let


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yourself think in this way, Mr. Ardell. It is unworthy of your sense and judgment. You do the young lady injustice. Try and be fair; allow her to be with you. She has a large amount of character. She may be——”

“There—enough—I am tired! I have letters to write. I like to see you, but now go away. Do not think me rude, but I must bid you go away. You can come and see me again if you like. I can talk to you better than to most people. Now I must write.”

“I am much obliged for your permission,” said Brook, rising, “and shall certainly avail myself of it.” He shook hands and departed.

“The old fellow is worth cultivating for every reason,” he said to himself, as he hailed a hansom and directed the driver to Old Broad-street. “His liking for me may take root, and bring forth golden grain. He is a study, too. There’s a screw loose in him. Then I must see that girl with the bonny brown hair and provocative eyes again. Heavens! What a catch she might be one of these days! But fate forbids such things to be. I am not so sure that she would be the right sort of woman for an ambitious man to marry. She is a trifle too self-willed and original. Anyhow, she is quite as likely to be a penniless working woman all her days, as to be the ‘feet of clay’ on which some natural leader of men shall build a lasting monument to himself or to his system. I have been a fool—an extremely weak fool. But, come what may, I have been blessed. I may have chances yet, and—well, there is as much



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unwisdom in looking too far ahead as in taking no thought for the morrow."

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The brief, sharp conflict with her grandfather seemed to have effectually roused Madge from the deplorable state of lethargic despair which had stirred Mrs. Pinnock's compassion. She looked sad enough, but she occupied herself with her clothes; she mended and arranged things—to the great satisfaction of the housekeeper.

"What are you packing up your box for, Miss Margaret?" she asked one morning, when she found the sullen little prisoner on her knees beside that receptacle, folding up some garments and laying them in it. "You are not thinking of going away, are you? I could ill spare you, my dear, now I am used to you."

"I wonder you do not hate the sight of me! I am so miserable and ill-tempered. I cannot help it, and I know I seem ungrateful, but I am not, really. I know how much I owe you. No, I am not packing up. Tell me—do you ever sell old clothes in London?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"There are a good many things here I can use myself, and a good many I cannot. If I could sell some of these I'd be very glad. I want some shoes, and I am afraid to think of the time (which must come) when I shall have no money at all. I look at my little bits of gold every day, till I think I shall grow like Mr. Ardell. Could you sell some of these things for me?" pointing to the box.

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"That I can. But I tell you what you must do more than anything else. And that is, go out and walk. I wonder you are alive. I don't think you have been three times across the threshold since you came here—nearly five weeks ago. I know Mr. Ardell expects his man of business this afternoon, and I'll just go up and tell him that I must go out. I'll wait and let Mr. Baker in, and then we'll go out. The shops are close by. I do wish you had someone to go out with!"

"So do I. Some day, when the fancy takes me, I will go out by myself. I never mind going out alone or being alone, and—I speak the language. But this is such an ugly dull place. Are there no trees—no grass anywhere?"

"I must try somehow to go with you to Regent's Park. It's a lovely place, and not far. If I could even shew you the way once! It's three years since I was there myself. It was the last time my dear boy was ashore for a while, and he used to take me out now and again. And lor! what a fuss and a worry the master used to be in about it."

"I wish he were here now," said Madge, mournfully. She sat down on the floor, leaning her elbow on the edge of the box and her head on her hand. "I wish he were here, and he might take *me* out."

"Bless your heart, Miss Margaret. You couldn't 'walk out' with the son of your grandfather's housekeeper," cried Mrs. Pinnock, not a little scandalised.

"Why not? Much good my grandfather does me. Your son looks nice and kind in his photo, and as to his being your son it's so much in his favour. Sailors

are fine fellows, and as to his not being a fine gentleman, artists are above all that nonsense, and I don't despair of being an artist yet."

"Oh, my dear, that's all very fine, but you'll find that 'like to like' is necessary all the world over. Look here, Miss Margaret, if you want shoes very much, there's a black silk I noticed as you were tumbling out your things the other day. I've not had a new gown for many a day. I would not mind giving you twenty or twenty-five shillings for it."

"No," said Madge, clasping her hands round one knee and gazing away into vacancy, "no, I like black silk. I will make it into a dress for myself. I have an idea for it." She closed her eyes for a moment to view the ideal garment. "But I tell you what, I have a dark red cashmere with a black guipure trimming, and I'll alter it for you. I *can*. It's newer than the silk. Find out what you ought to give me for it; I do not want too much."

"I'll look at it. You are a sensible little lady, Miss Margaret."

"I ought to be. I've seen nothing but pinching over pennies all my life. Can we go out secretly after dinner? I am dying to get my shoes, but we must settle about the dress and the price first."

"Oh, you could take some of the money you have and replace it when——"

"No, no, no!" interrupted Madge, vehemently. "If I don't keep these very same gold pieces Mrs. Caldecott gave me I'll never believe I have the same money."

"Well, my dear, I'll lend you ten shillings with

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pleasure to buy your shoes, and I can give you the difference after we find out——”

“Thank you, oh, thank you!”

And, jumping up, she plunged her arms into her box and dragged out a very solid, wintry-looking costume from its depths. She held it out.

“There!” she exclaimed. “Take it. We can settle it all after.”

Mrs. Pinnock seized it, and held it up by the shoulder seams to the light. She examined the hooks and eyes, peered into the pocket, turned up the lining, looked at the hem, and pronounced it very good.

“It’s uncommon solid, and quite stylish,” she said. “It will last me three or four winters.”

“So glad you like it. Just take it for the ten shillings, dear Mrs. Pinnock.”

“God forbid!” said that good woman, piously. “I’m not the sort as would rob the fatherless. I declare I feel quite griggly at the notion of going out myself. I’ll just run down and tell Mr. Ardell that you must go out and I must go with you.”

“Need you tell him?” asked Madge.

“Yes, sure. I never told him the ghost of a lie or hid anything from him I could possibly help all these long weary years, and it’s *that* gives me the hold I believe I have over him. Put on your best frock before dinner, Miss Madge, so as not to lose time.”

## CHAPTER IX.

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—This leaves me in the best of health and spirits, as I hope it will find you. We have had unusually favourable weather, and altogether things have gone very well. I am sending you a very short letter this time, for you will hear more about me than I can put on paper from a gentleman who has promised to call upon you as soon as he gets to London. Mr. Richard Waring is an artist and a friend of our 'owner.' It seems he was offered a berth on board the Osprey that he might have a look at the coast along the Mediterranean. He's a capital fellow, and we became great chums. Our round this time was to Leghorn, Genoa, Bastia, Syracuse, Port Said, &c. At some places we stayed a few days; at others not many hours. But the lots of beautiful pictures Waring contrived to paint would astonish you. I wish you could see them. I warned him that you were living with a crotchety old crank, and that he must go down the area steps if he wanted a comfortable talk with you. He is a real gentleman, and would be equally at home in Marlborough House or Mr. Ardell's kitchen. I am sending you a little keepsake by him, and I hope you'll write as soon as you've had a talk with Waring. He left us at Malta and took the P. and O. boat, as he was obliged to be in London on the 30th, and we had to go to Trieste. I'm afraid I shall not see you for some time, as we only return to Swansea to ship coal for Bergen.

"Ever your loving son,

"GEORGE PINNOCK."

Entering the kitchen with a fresh portrait which she had drawn of her humble, useful friend, Madge found her absorbed in the perusal of this epistle,

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her keen dark eyes moist with the pleasure it gave the mother's heart, which beat so warmly in her bosom.

"Oh, Miss Margaret, my dear! Here's a nice letter from my boy. It's wonderful how he never forgets his old mother. Would you care to read it, miss?"

Madge did not care in the least, and was on the point of saying so, when a glance at the happy face, elated and beaming, warned her not to be unsympathetic.

"Thank you, Mrs. Pinnock, I should," and she stretched out her hand for the letter.

As she perused it, her indifference warmed up to vivid interest. Her colour rose, her eyes sparkled.

"It *is* a nice letter!" she exclaimed, as she returned it.

"Yes, ain't it? And it's just like my Georgie, to send a fine gentleman down the airey steps to see his old mother. If my boy were Admiral of the Fleet, he'd never be ashamed of me!"

"Why should he? You are very nice. If I ever make money, and have a smart house, or marry a rich man—and one is as likely as the other—you shall come and stay with me. Look, Mrs. Pinnock, I have finished your portrait; at least, I will put it out of my sight to avoid touching it any more. What do you think of it now?"

"Eh, Miss Margaret. You have made me look pounds better! But—but—is it as like?"

"Yes, quite. The reason why it is better looking, is that we were both of us in a better mood; you

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pitied me more, and I understood you more. Oh, Mrs. Pinnock, will you not let me see this friend of your son's? I long to speak to an artist once more. He may have been in Paris; he may even have worked at Jourdain's. Won't you let me speak to him?"

"Why, yes, of course, my dear child! And I'll let him see my picture. It may not be beautiful, but it is just lifelike. I don't suppose he could do better himself—leastways, not without paint!"

"Oh, poor Mr. Waring! What have you done to be compared to a clumsy beginner like myself! Give me a little flour; the fire is not quite out. I will make a little paste to fasten on some tissue paper to your picture. Then *could* you come upstairs and help me to fit on the black silk dress? I have planned it and tacked it, but I must try it on."

"Yes, to be sure. I'll just put down the—what d'ye call it?"

"The bouillon."

"Aye, the bullyon to stew, and then I'll come upstairs."

A fortnight had elapsed since Madge had gone out to shop with her kind protectress, and the cloud then partially dispersed had not again gathered as heavily as before. She had felt more interest in life, and a faint gleam of hope had succeeded the death-like chill which had paralysed her heart. This, however, was growing fainter, for Brook did not appear. Why she expected him, it would have puzzled her to explain. But, somehow, an idea that he was in sympathy with her, that many a true word was

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spoken in jest, and that his playful query as to delivering an imprisoned princess, meant that he would help her with her grandfather, had taken hold of her. She used to sit and think of him, and recall his soft smile, his caressing blue eyes, his refined voice. She felt, too, that he took an interest in her. Margaret Ardell was by no means conceited. Indeed, her high artistic standard of beauty made her painfully alive to what she considered her own extreme plainness. Yet she was aware that the few men she had met had neither overlooked nor neglected her. She did not understand it. She was only conscious that they liked her and noticed her, and deeply enjoyed that consciousness.

That Brook should make no effort to see her was a great disappointment, though she told herself she was extremely unreasonable. At present the prospect of seeing another man, and that man an artist, was a pleasant diversion to the current of her thoughts. She worked hard to finish the black silk dress, and, though it was by no means the correct thing to wear lace in her present stage of mourning, she loved the dainty decoration, so indulged in it.

This garment finished, she put it on most carefully every afternoon, and when Mrs. Pinnock laughed at her preparation to receive the expected visitor, said, gravely:

"I feel it is my duty to make the most of myself."

"Which you certainly *do*, Miss Margaret!" was the admiring reply. "I'm sure the difference between you in your old apron, or with your skirt turned up, a dab of chalk on your face and your

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hair, as if you had been dragged through a bush backwards, and yourself smartened up, is past belief! Why, you look—well, not so much a pretty girl, as a sweet, charming young lady!”

“Instead of a little devil, as you know I am.”

“No, that I don’t! And yet, miss, you ain’t an angel.”

“You are right,” rejoined Madge. “I wish this friend of your son would hurry up. I shall take the gilt off my new old dress wearing it for nothing. I do want to shew my drawing of you to Mr. Waring; yet, I wouldn’t *ask* him to look at it. How can I manage?”

“Let me see,” returned the housekeeper, knitting her brows in deep thought. “Have you the picture with you?”

“Here it is,” and Madge lifted it from the table where it lay, turning back the sheet of tissue-paper which covered it, to gaze at her handiwork. “The more I look at it, the less I see the likeness,” she said, discontentedly.

“Oh, nonsense, my dear! It’s ever so much better than the first one. Look here, I’ll shew you what I’ll do.”

Rummaging the front of her dress as she spoke, she produced a couple of huge pins from that living pincushion and put them in her mouth. Then, taking the portrait of herself tenderly in her hands, and smoothing down the tissue-paper at the back, she fixed it with the pins against one of the dresser shelves opposite the door by which the expected visitor would enter.

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"There now!" she exclaimed; and, drawing over a chair, she placed it under the picture and put her knitting on the kitchen table before it. "There now! I'll sit here while I'm talking to him, and if he doesn't see the likeness, he'll be a blind bat instead of a hartist."

"What a good idea! You are a very clever woman, Mrs. Pin." Madge had reached that degree of familiarity which leads to abbreviation, and the affectionate diminutive of "Pinny" was not far off.

"Oh, I ain't stupid as regards common things, or I wouldn't be where I am! But I do not like the notion of this gentleman a-coming down the airey steps and finding a young lady like you in the kitchen!"

"Why? I don't mind a bit. I shouldn't mind Mr. Brook finding me here. Well, of course, he knows who I am. But artists are not as other men are. They are lifted above these small considerations. Anyway, Mrs. Pinnock, I don't want to interfere with your talk about your son, so I will not stay here now. You have a nice chat, and then I'll come in. I will go and sit in the pantry; I have a book. But mind you don't let your visitor go until I have seen him. Knock down something; make a noise, and then I'll come in by accident."

"All right, Miss Margaret. Why, my goodness, here he is coming down the steps at last!"

"And he is as high as the house!" exclaimed Madge, leaning forward to catch a glimpse of him. "There, there is a little tray; knock it over when I

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am to come in." And she vanished as the bell sounded.

Mrs. Pinnock hastened to open the door, and ushered in a very tall, largely-built man, with abundant light reddish brown hair and moustaches. His face was sunburnt to a brick-dust tint, and he had keen, steely grey eyes. He wore dark tweed knickerbockers, a Norfolk jacket, and a soft, round, broad-brimmed felt hat, not a little crushed, which he lifted courteously, saying: "Mrs. Pinnock, I presume," in a deep, strong voice.

"Yes, sir, and right well pleased to see a friend of my dear boy's. I suppose you are Mr. Waring?"

"I am." He laid aside his hat, and took the chair placed for him opposite the drawing, in obedience to the invitation: "Do sit down, sir."

"I intended to have called on you sooner, but I found I was obliged to go away to the country, and only returned last night. I posted George's letter as soon as I reached England."

"Thank you, sir, I got it all right; and it is kind of you to come and see me. How was my dear boy when you saw him last?"

"Oh, first-rate! We were great chums, and he is a very clever fellow. Our skipper fell sick, and George, of course, took his place, and navigated the steamer through some uncommon rough weather. He'll do right well in his profession, I expect." And the visitor launched into what his listener considered a most eloquent and enchanting account of her son's sayings and doings—a recital which quite banished Madge temporarily from Mrs. Pinnock's thoughts.

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At last Waring—or, as he was more generally known to a tolerably large circle of acquaintances, “Dick Waring”—pulled two or three packets from a courier bag, which hung from a strap across his shoulder.

“George desired me to give you these,” he said, pushing them towards her.

“Dear, dear! The poor boy never forgets his old mother,” cried Mrs. Pinnock, opening the parcels eagerly.

One contained a huge cameo brooch, another a coral bracelet, then came a pair of mosaic ear-rings. Finally, a photograph of himself, which, to the mother, was the gem of the collection.

“Ah, it’s just himself, only he looks so much older. Don’t you think it wonderful like, sir?”

“Yes, very good. It was taken at Genoa. By the way, that’s a very clever sketch of yourself up there, Mrs. Pinnock. No photograph can give the character hand work does, in my opinion. Who is the artist?”

“I’m very proud of that picture, sir! It’s my young lady’s work—Miss Margaret Ardell, who is a very kind young lady, indeed. She often comes down to have a talk with me in the kitchen. She is that lonely, poor young thing, in this desert of a house; the only bit of pleasure she has is with her pencil and paper. I’d like her to know you was pleased with my picture, sir. Dear, dear, my hands is that weak! Talking of my boy upset my nerves.” Here she happened to knock the little tray off the dresser with much noise.

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Waring made no reply. He walked round the big table to take a closer view of the portrait, while the housekeeper watched the door, a little anxiously, as some minutes elapsed and Madge did not make her appearance.

"If the young lady is really young—say in her teens—she must have decided ability to have done this!" said Waring. "I should say she has studied in France."

"She has, I am sure, sir. Why, she only came to us from Paris last May," replied Mrs. Pinnock, audibly, while she said to herself: "She has never, sure, got into a bad temper because I kept her waiting a bit, and gone away upstairs!"

But, as the thought passed through her mind, the door opened, and Madge walked in, saying:

"Mrs. Pinnock!" and then stopped quite still, gazing with a half-surprised, half-smiling look at Waring, who drew himself up and made her a profound bow.

"Oh, Miss Margaret, my dear! This is the gentleman I told you of, who has been so kind as to come and tell me all about my Georgie."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Madge, coming into the kitchen as if it was quite natural to meet a visitor there.

"I have been admiring your likeness of Mrs. Pinnock," said Waring, with equal composure, and in a kindly, if rather patronising, tone.

"And you really think it like?" asked Madge, coming over to stand beside him.

"Yes, really. I believe if you work hard,

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you may do well ; nothing to be done without that, eh?"

To Waring, this slight little creature seemed almost a child, so he spoke with a certain degree of familiarity.

"I know it," she returned ; "but I haven't a chance of working."

"Why? What's wanting? Not the will, I am sure. Yours is not the face of an idler," and he looked earnestly into her sad, soft eyes.

"I cannot work without pencils, and chalk, and paper, and drawing-boards, and—they cost money."

"Well, yes. Is your grandfather one of those conservative old gentlemen who would deny to girls—I mean young ladies—the right to use their eyes, their hands, their brains?"

"He would let me do anything and everything, so long as I did not ask for money, and I have none of my own."

"Not an uncommon condition for young ladies of your tender years," he returned, with a big, but not unmelodious laugh.

"I am not so very young, Mr. Waring. I was nineteen last March."

"No? I took you for two or three years less!"

"I wish I were! It is horrid to grow old, and time flies—flies, oh, so fast! Enforced idleness is enough to drive one mad, when you think of sitting with folded hands, while days, and months and years vanish away." This was uttered with so much passion that Waring's keen grey eyes grew soft with compassion as he looked at the speaker.

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"You must do better than *that*, Miss Ardell. You must coax your grandfather to hand you out a five-pound note to start with."

Madge burst out laughing. "I might as well ask him for the Invalides, or St. Paul's Cathedral. Imagine asking Mr. Ardell for five pounds!" and she turned to Mrs. Pinnock.

"Well, miss, when gentlemen get old, they get crotchety about money. You'll find many just like your grandpapa!" The housekeeper was very faithful to her salt.

"I'm sure I hope not," observed Madge, with such hearty sincerity that Waring could not restrain a smile.

"May I ask if you worked in Jourdain's studio?"

"I did for three happy years," cried Madge.

"So did I, a long time ago. I'd like to see more of your work. I am a landscape painter."

"I always crave to do the human figure. But how difficult it is!"

"That's true. Well, I mustn't trespass any longer, so——"

"You don't trespass. I love to talk to you!" exclaimed Madge, to Mrs. Pinnock's horror.

"Ah, you must have had a long fast from artistic chatter!" said Waring, indulgently. "Do take my advice: try to persuade your grandfather to let you study. It need not cost a great deal. I should be most happy to give you what help and counsel I can. Tell Mr. Ardell that he may be the means of enabling you to make your own living."

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"If Mrs. Pinnock would ask him," said Madge, reluctantly. "He hates me."

"Surely that is impossible!" exclaimed Waring, in honest surprise. "Suppose, Mrs. Pinnock, you bring Miss Ardell to see my Mediterranean sketches. My studio is near this—just the other side of Tottenham Court-road—23, Fitzhenry-street. Here's my card. I shall be all in order next week. Come any afternoon that suits you. I don't go out much before five o'clock."

"Oh, thank you. You are good. Of course, I'll come, anyhow. But I hope Mrs. Pinnock will come too."

"Of course, I shall, Miss Margaret."

"Then I must say good-morning. I wish you all possible success, Miss Ardell. Think of the importunate widow, and follow her example."

"There is much less chance for an importunate spinster. Good-bye."

"I am going to write to your son, Mrs. Pinnock, and I shall give a first-rate account of you."

"Thank you, sir. I am sure I am most grateful." But Waring was already half-way up the steps.

## CHAPTER X.

MADGE sank down into a chair and clasped her hands.

"Ahem!"—a portentous "ahem!" from Mrs. Pinnock. "Miss Margaret, my dear, you'll excuse me, as you have no mamma, or elderly lady to tell you what's right or wrong, and you that young—so I'll make bold to say that it's not nice or modest for a young lady to tell a gentleman she 'loves to talk to him'; besides, men are that conceited——"

"I don't care a straw whether it is or not," replied Madge, slowly and dreamily. "It's quite true."

"But, Miss Margaret, to talk like that to a man!"

"He's not a man to me. He's an artist, and might be of use."

"Bless me, miss, he seems to me a man and an uncommon fine one."

"Oh, he's big enough, for that matter. And I think he is nice and kind, but a sort of man who could not possibly understand my grandfather."

"Well, miss, speaking of your grandfather, I was sorry to hear you mention him so disrespectfully."

"I couldn't help it. Isn't he cruel to me? Why should he spoil my life, as he will do if I stay here? Is it my fault that I was born? Is it my fault that I haven't a penny in the world? I would work with all my heart for independence, but I cannot learn without being taught. I would like *you* ever so

much better, Mrs. Pin, if you did not talk nonsense. Is Mr. Ardell a creature you can respect? I might pity the miserable old man, but respect him—rubbish! I never could. Still, I'll try to persuade him to give me at least a term at Mr. Waring's studio. That is, if Mr. Waring would take me."

"I would if I were you," rejoined Mrs. Pinnock, after a moment's thought.

She saw her young friend was in no mood to be argued with, and was touched by her pallid cheeks and wrathful, gloomy eyes.

"Don't be so downhearted. There's no knowing what good a day may bring forth. It's too bad the way you keep yourself shut up in this old house."

"How can I go out when I do not even know my way about?"

"Well, that's true. I'll make a stretch to go out with you, my dear. To-morrow is our cleaning day, and Mrs. Dabbs will be done with the upper rooms by dinner time. If it is nice and fine after I'll put on my best bonnet and go with you as far as Regent's Park. Maybe you wouldn't mind going a distance by yourself of a morning when there's few about but nurses and children, just for a little exercise; you look that pale and heart-broken."

"Thank you so much. Yes, I shall be delighted to go there if I only know my way. Why are you so good to me, Pinny, dear? I am a nasty, ill-tempered little sinner, and I cannot make myself nice and pleasant. But if I could only shew my real self—could turn my heart inside out for you to read—I don't think you would find me half bad."

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"That I am sure you are not, my dear Miss Margaret; only, like many another young creature, you are a bit self-willed."

"Tell me, how did you ever persuade my grandfather to let you have Mrs. Dabbs to help you?"

"Lord knows! It was desperate hard to manage him at first, but I thank God he took to me, and, after a few scuffles over the money, in which I held my own, he trusted me with a weekly sum to do everything. It's hard work, I can tell you. And if he had half a dozen more come to stay he'd never give me a penny more."

"What a *corvée* for you." Then after a pause: "I think I'll put a little fresh crape on my hat. It begins to look brown. I hope you'll be able to come out to-morrow. But I daresay it will pour with rain; it generally does when one wants it to be fine."

"Ah, Miss Margaret, thinking like that is not the way to bring luck!"

"What can bring luck? Who can tell?"

Madge's evil anticipations were not fulfilled. The next day was exceptionally fine, and Mrs. Pinnock dressed herself in her best to escort her young lady with proper respect.

"You'll not mind my taking Miss Margaret out for a bit, sir? She hasn't left the house for a week and she looks that bad."

Mr. Ardell looked up from the complicated calculation he was working out on scraps of paper and backs of letters, saved with great care till he had accumulated a pile, and gazed in a bewildered way at his housekeeper.

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"This is the cleaning day, you know, sir, so Mrs. Dabbs will be here if you want anything. Miss Margaret looks that bad I thought I must take her out."

"Oh, take her, take her!" cried the old man, as the sense of Mrs. Pinnock's speech penetrated to his brain. "Take her away; don't bring her back."

"Indeed, I will bring her back. How would you like to pay the police for finding her if she was lost?"

"Go!" returned her master. "Go, go, I'm busy."

Quite content with this ungracious permission Mrs. Pinnock left the room, after assuring Mr. Ardehl that she would not be away more than two hours, if so much.

Madge awaited her in the hall, and they sallied forth in high spirits.

"And you have lived twelve years in that dungeon!" exclaimed Madge, looking up at the grim, brick front of the house, darkened by London air and smuts almost to black. "You are a wonderful woman."

"It was pretty bad at first, Miss Margaret, I can tell you. But it was a great matter for me to get food and shelter and wages, and so keep my poor little bit of money for my boy. So I got used to it, and, mind you, miss, your grandfather has been good to me. You see, he was keener and more alive to things twelve years ago, and he saw or felt that I was honest and hardworking; so, in a manner of speaking, he took a fancy to me."

"Well, he hasn't taken a fancy to *me*."

"There, there's the King's Cross 'bus!" cried Mrs. Pinnock, elevating her umbrella. "We'll go along to Euston-road and take another there. Not that I hold with spending a lot of pennies on 'buses. They soon run into shillings," she resumed, when they had taken their places, "but to-day I want to save time."

"To be sure," rejoined Madge, who gave her whole attention to Mrs. Pinnock's explanation of the route.

When they reached Portland-road, where they left the omnibus, and Madge caught a glimpse of the trees and grass in the Park, she was indeed delighted.

"I began to think you had not such things in London," she exclaimed. "I shall often come here."

"Stay till you see the Walk and the flowers and shrubs, and the trees over your head."

They walked on, thoroughly enjoying the air and the perfume, for the day was exhilarating, and the beds of sweet pea and mignonette gave forth their delightful scents.

"How I wish I could live near this, or in the Park. There are plenty of houses, I see."

"Aye, and you want plenty of money to live in them. Look, my dear, what a lot of nice children. Ain't they dressed to the nines? And what pretty little dears!"

"Yes. These fresh, fair, golden-haired English babies look like angels. But see, there is a cherub of a boy beating a little seraphim of a sister with all his might. Both are yelling like imps. And, Mrs.

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"Oh, no, ma'am. Only I do not know how she would find her way back by herself."

"I should be very glad to walk back with her part of the way and see her into an omnibus, if that will do. Where do you live, Madge?"

"Osborne-place, near Russell-square," cried Mrs. Pinnock, eager to give her *protégée* a happy hour. "Maybe it is too long a walk, ma'am, but if you could put her into the King's Cross 'bus, I think you'd know where to get out, Miss Margaret?"

"Yes. I looked carefully at every street."

So it was arranged.

"You won't feel lonely and dull going back?" asked Madge, with a touch of sympathy she rarely shewed.

"Is it me? My dear young lady, haven't I been all alone by myself over twelve years?"

"That sounds rather awful," said Mrs. Grey. "Then we must let you go, I suppose. I shall see Miss Ardell safe into the omnibus, and another time she will know her way quite well."

Mrs. Pinnock said good-bye and started for Osborne-place, while Mrs. Grey called the neat young nurse-girl, who came up with a smart perambulator, into which Miss Kitty allowed herself to be lifted with some difficulty.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE walk across the Park was the first gleam of real pleasure which had brightened poor Madge's dreary existence since she reached her grandfather's abode. What endless memories they had to recall and discuss! Mrs. Grey had been for three or four years Margaret's schoolfellow in the establishment where the latter's aunt was professor of English. Our little heroine was considerably her junior, yet they became fast friends, Madge dominating her elder in a curious manner.

Existence was by no means luxurious in the diminutive town of Stoltzberg, but Constance Freeman, who dwelt within the scholastic walls of Frau Biedermann's well-known school, on what is called "reciprocal terms," saw much more of its seamy side than Madge, who resided with her aunt in the fifth *étage* of a rambling mansion close by the school.

Constance was the motherless only child of a retired Indian officer, who was chiefly occupied by his constant care of his own infirm health and narrow income. His daughter was quite a secondary consideration. He had, however, conscience enough to give her the means of earning her bread, and, therefore, spared enough from his own outlay to send her to study music in exchange for Italian and music lessons to younger children at Frau Biedermann's institution. Here she was chiefly remarkable for a

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certain sweetness of manner and speech, which endeared her to Madge and her aunt. While poorly fed and most indifferently dressed, she gave little promise of the beauty she developed later. Still, both girls—for Mrs. Grey was little more—looked back with profound pleasure to that sleepy little Rhenish town, to the infinite joy of that period of glorious youth with its vague splendour of indefinite anticipation, when “the light that surrounds us is all from within.”

Constance had been taken away to Paris for some final training, as it was decided she should become a professor of the piano, and there Madge and her aunt followed a year later. The friends met again, but did not see much of each other.

Captain Freeman, who had always resided in Italy and the South of France, so far sacrificed himself as to take his daughter to London, intending to start her on her career. He was a lonely man, not caring to renew any old links with friends or relations, which were severed by his departure to India in very early days. He was very solitary and miserable—not to say extremely disagreeable—and, taking a severe cold the morning he had witnessed his daughter's marriage, he died after a brief illness.

So much Madge gathered on their way to Mrs. Grey's house.

“I need not ask if all's well with you,” said Madge as they approached the neat little villa, before described and named “Ivy Lodge.” “You look so well, you have grown quite pretty! Rather handsome! I don't remember thinking you good-looking in the Stoltzberg days.”

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"Happiness is a wonderful beautifier, dear," returned Mrs. Grey, with a bright smile. "So for every reason, I wish I saw you looking better. I am afraid this grandfather of yours is rather an ogre."

"He is very disagreeable, but I cannot understand him. I am going to make a desperate effort to persuade him to let me go on with my drawing. I should have begun painting soon, if I had stayed on in Paris."

This brought them to the little wooden gate which admitted to the garden of Mrs. Grey's home.

"What a sweet place! cried Madge. "I do hope Mr. Grey won't come in just yet. My aunt used to say that Englishmen always hated their wives' friends, male or female."

"I do not think that is quite true. At all events, he is away from home just now."

The servant of the house came at the sound of the bell, and Madge was ushered into the pretty, homelike drawing-room, from the aspect of which Madge came to the conclusion that Mr. Grey must be fairly well-off; and the kind but rebellious heart which hid itself under Madge's cool, self-contained exterior, rejoiced sincerely at her friend's good fortune.

Then Mrs. Grey took her young friend upstairs, and made her remove her bonnet and said pleasant things as to her improved womanly appearance, and kissed her, and sympathised with her respecting her ogriish grandfather; while Madge noticed the abundant silver *accessoires* of the dressing-table, the rings and trinkets that filled the china trays.

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Tea ensued, with fresh scones, crisp and buttered, respecting which Miss Kitty and her mother had a slight difference of opinion; but the latter was gently firm, and Kitty was obliged to give way.

"I don't think you ever cared much for children, Madge," said Mrs. Grey, noticing her young friend's calmly judicial aspect as she watched the struggle.

"No, I don't much like them. Why are they always so tiresome?"

"They would not be human children if they were not! You should remember that at Kitty's age they really have no more—nay, not nearly so much sense as a dog or a cat, and one must teach them almost in the same way. That is what I always try to impress on her father; but he does not mind me much."

"She is a pretty little creature; I like to look at her. Doesn't her father care for her?"

"Oh, yes, of course he does—he must; but he won't bear being troubled with her. Later on, no doubt, she will be a great pet."

"Tell me about your husband, Constance. I do not like to ask tiresome questions, but I am interested in him."

"I suppose he would not seem anything particular to other people, but to me he is rather a hero. He is about ten years older than I am, not handsome, but nice and gentlemanlike-looking; very kind and generous, and, oh, so good to me!" Tears stood in the speaker's eyes as she uttered the words. "He is very clever, too. We met in Paris just before my father joined me; then he followed us to London. My poor father took cold at my wedding, and that was the be-

ginning of the end. Once he took to his bed, he sank rapidly. Mr. Grey is an engineer. He is often away building bridges, making railways and embankments; all sorts of things in outlandish places. And then, you see, we want to make a little 'pile' before we take a house and establish ourselves. Mr. Grey hopes when he is better known to join some big engineering firm, so I keep very quiet. It is, of course, a little dull, but when he comes back for a short holiday, it is such happiness I can well bear the intermediate blank. I only wish, dear Madge, that you may meet so loving and tender a friend, so charming a companion as I have!"

"Thank you. I am pretty sure I never shall. Also that I never shall deserve one so much."

"Oh, deserving doesn't count."

"Perhaps not. Still, I am plain and dull (not stupid), perhaps obstinate. But oh, Constance, I believe I could love anyone who loved me, or even someone who did not care for me very much—well, too awfully well. There is no good in thinking of such unlikely things. At present, I am rather miserable."

Their confidential talk turned on Madge's surroundings. Not being under immediate irritation from her grandfather she was fairly just in her description of him, and found great comfort in giving her friend a sketch of Mrs. Pinnock and her son's artist acquaintance, which made Mrs. Grey laugh and declare that Madge was still the same funny little creature she always was. Then Madge begged for some of the arias and nocturnes she used to love.

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And evening was beginning to grow softly dusk before Madge consented to go back.

"I will not ask you to come and see me. I fancy Mr. Ardell allows no followers, and I am not going to risk an irritating rebuke."

"You are right. And, indeed, Madge, I never call on anyone. Mr. Grey says if we intend to keep out of sight, we must do so completely, or give it up. The only visitor I shall admit is yourself, and you must give me a little line of notice when you are coming. You see, Mr. Grey sometimes comes unexpectedly, and insists on carrying me off to the seaside or Wales, or across the Channel, and I should be sorry if you came and missed me. However, I am quite sure of next Tuesday. Can you come for the afternoon, dear? It is so nice to see you."

"It is rather heavenly for me! Yes, of course, I'll come."

These were their last words as Mrs. Grey was seeing Madge into the omnibus.

"You will please stop at the corner of Brunswick-square for this young lady," she said to the conductor.

"All right, mum," returned that much-tried individual, and Madge was whisked off.

"No one could know if she was young or old, plain or pretty, in that thick veil and long dark dust cloak," thought Madge, looking after her friend as she vanished among the throng of passengers. "I am awfully puzzled about her. Of course, I don't much mind all she says about the invisible Grey; I only hope he is not a first-rate burglar! It's like a

romance in one of those little English periodicals Lucy Caldecott used to send me."

Meantime Constance Grey went away homewards in deep thought. It had been a real pleasure to meet little Madge Ardell. She was associated with the few very happy days Constance had enjoyed in those faraway times. Still she was not quite easy in her mind on the subject of her visit, and half regretted she had asked her to come on Tuesday. Should she tell Bertie of her *rencontre* with an old friend or not? It would be wiser and safer, perhaps. She felt she ought to do so, yet she *knew* she had not the courage. She loved her husband most fondly, yet it was not the "perfect love which casteth out fear." She dreaded a grave, disapproving look, a word of rebuke, from—from the lips that were so ready to cling to hers with impassioned fervour. No, she would receive Madge on the following Tuesday, and enjoy her visit. Bertie was safe at Brussels, where he had an important appointment, until Sunday, and she would tell Madge that after all it might be better to wait for a note from her friend than to take the initiative in writing. Madge was such a cool, sensible little thing, not given to take offence, and quite impenetrable, if she chose to keep a secret. How charming it would be when this period of suppression was over, and they could pay visits and entertain their friends like other people! Meantime, she must be most careful to obey her husband's injunctions rigidly. *She* was honoured by his confidence. *She* knew the true secret of his career, why he must leave no traces of his various

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wanderings. It would not last long now, and her Bertie would shew up in his really important character—perhaps as Consul in some big commercial city—perhaps as a member of Parliament. No, she would not worry him with even the mention of so insignificant a little creature as Madge.

Decision brought its usual effect—tranquillity. Having made up her mind Constance Grey slept well, and, though a little disappointed at not receiving a letter from her husband, began the usual routine of her day. She read the morning paper, the leaders—as well as the births, marriages and deaths—for a little insight into politics was, she thought, necessary in order to know what her husband was talking about when in a serious mood. Then baby had to be played with and taught to walk in the garden while her young attendant was otherwise employed. Some entries in her accounts which she kept carefully, and a paragraph in the journal letter she always wrote for her husband, succeeded, and filled up the time till early dinner was served. This moment was close at hand, as Constance locked up her writing-book, when she was almost startled by a loud peal of the bell at the gate.

She rose and watched the servant as she went to open it, when, to her surprise and joy, she recognised her husband.

He saw her standing in the window and waved his hand, coming across the grass to enter and embrace her.

“Why, Bertie, dearest, I thought you were in Brussels by this——”

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"I have been unexpectedly delayed, so I came home to ask for a bit of luncheon. I cross to-night. G. called on me yesterday just before I was going to start and carried me off to see a mutual friend, who had news of some importance, which I am to add verbally to my despatches. We talked far into the night, so I would not startle you by returning."

"It is nice to have this peep at you; but I fear our early dinner is too much a nursery meal to suit you."

"Am I so hard to please, Constance?"

"Perhaps I am hard to please for you. It is only some roast mutton and a tapioca pudding, dear."

Grey threw himself back in his chair, laughing heartily.

"Why, Con, I did not think you could be satisfied yourself with such a milk diet. My dear woman, you'll stupefy your palate, and an appreciation of dainty feeding is an indication of intelligence."

They passed a pleasant hour together, however, the husband being graciously pleased to partake of his wife's simple fare. But she fancied he was unusually preoccupied.

"You'll be very careful, my love, not to throw yourself in the way of making acquaintances. If you want to shop, postpone it till I can take you a little trip to Paris. I am engaged in rather a delicate negotiation just now, and wish to lie very low."

"Don't be afraid," said Constance, as she gave him a final kiss, thinking: "Thank God he did not find Madge here."

## CHAPTER XII.

MR. ARDELL had been in the City on this very morning, and had felt so tired that, after some struggles with himself, he had succumbed to the weakness of the flesh and indulged in a cup of tea and some bread and butter at a restaurant, reflecting that Mrs. Pinnock had told him there was only cold meat for dinner, and he could have it early or late, as he liked.

Considerably refreshed, he prolonged his round and visited his lawyers, from whence he set out to walk home, and thus put some limit to his unwonted extravagance. But he had overrated his strength, and when he reached Holborn he found himself shrinking in an unaccountable manner from crossing the crowded thoroughfare opposite "Great Turnstile."

It was, therefore, an immense relief when a familiar voice said close at his ear :

"Mr. Ardell! I see you have been wandering far afield. It is an oppressive, sultry sort of day. May I walk home with you?"

He turned and saw Brook.

"Thank you, thank you. Yes, it is trying kind of weather, and I had an indifferent night. Yes, I'll take your arm. I thought you were still out of town."

"I returned some days ago, but have been rather busy. Would you like a cab, Mr. Ardell?"

## The Yellow Fiend     I I I

"A cab? God forbid! No. Of all wasteful expenditures taking a cab is the worst. The men who drive them ought to coin money."

"You must remember that horses cannot live without hay and even a small modicum of oats."

"Humph! What are oats a bushel?"

"My dear sir, I am incapable of attempting the abstruse calculation I see you are contemplating."

"Everything can be calculated, everything; but after you have worked out the uttermost fraction, there's a something, my dear Brook, an inpalpable, indefinite something, that may be friendly, or inimical, we never know which, against whose enmity we cannot strive and whose favour we cannot exhaust. It is a cowardly spirit, my boy, and if only we can gather up enough to make an important hostage we can almost dictate our own terms."

Here a fit of coughing interrupted the speaker, and Brook thought he was about to breathe his last.

"Let me call a cab, Mr. Ardell. I don't think you can manage to walk so far."

"No, no, no, I tell you. I am always better after one of these fits. Let's go on, unless you have any engagements. If so——"

"I have not, I assure you, at least not till a couple of hours later. Come along, then, we'll take it easy."

At last they reached Osborne-place, and on ringing, rather emphatically, to Brook's surprise the door was opened by Margaret, the front of her dress turned back, her cuffs and lower part of her sleeves

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also tucked up, and a duster pulled through her waistband.

"What—what's the matter?" stammered Mr. Ardell, evidently much disturbed.

"I am very sorry to annoy you, but I cannot help coming to the door. Your dinner is ready," said Madge, with much composure, though she looked very white and rather ill-at-ease. "Mrs. Pinnock slipped on the kitchen stairs just at dinner time. She fell and doubled her foot somehow under her, spraining her ankle badly. She was in such pain I did not know what to do, so I went for the doctor who has a big red light in the street round the corner."

"What am I to do? What is to become of me?" exclaimed Mr. Ardell, clutching Brook's arm. "In all these years I never knew Mrs. Pinnock to be ill or disabled before."

"I will do the best I can," said Madge, consolingly. "I can cook a little, and I was obliged to send for Mrs. Dabbs to help me. You see, Mrs. Pinnock cannot go upstairs, so we have made her a bed in the back kitchen, and I'll stay with her all night. But I'm sure you'll understand that I must have Mrs. Dabbs in the morning."

"Ruin! Ruin and defeat, utter defeat!" soliloquised Ardell, in a tone of agony, sinking down on one of the hall chairs and letting Brook's arm go.

"It is very unfortunate," he said, "but really, Miss Ardell seems to have done well and wisely under the circumstances. You cannot expect your granddaughter to be nurse *and* general servant."

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"I should not mind at all if it were possible to manage both, but it is impossible."

Mr. Ardell moaned.

"Do try and persuade him to go into the dining-room and eat," said Madge, confidentially, to Brook. "I've laid the table and I will keep out of sight as much as ever I can."

"You have done wonders. Do you mean that your grandfather does not like to see you?" This in a low tone.

"He *dislikes* seeing me very much," returned Madge, calmly.

"Is that woman gone?" asked Mr. Ardell, rousing up.

"She is. Let me bring you your soup."

Ardell rose and tottered into the dining-room, while Madge hurried away downstairs.

"It's a bad business, Mr. Ardell," said Brook, cheerfully, "but we must submit to the inevitable, and your own sense will tell you that in such a fix you *must* have help. May I recommend a very respectable sort of nurse, who would be most useful in many ways?"

This was a romance on Brook's part.

"I feel faint," murmured Mr. Ardell.

"Here is the soup," said Madge at the door. "Perhaps you would put it on the table before him?"

Brook complied, and then returned to the hall.

"You really must not be alone," he said, kindly.

"No, it would not do."

"Why did you let the person who was here go away?"

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"I did not," returned Madge, coolly. "She has gone to the chemist for some more lotion, but she cannot stay the night."

Brook told her of his offer to find a nurse.

"Mr. Ardell would not hear of such a thing, I am sure," she said. "I do not mind being alone through the night, and Mrs. Dabbs will come early in the morning."

"You are wonderfully plucky, Miss Ardell. It is a frightful business for you altogether. I wish I could help you. What can I do?"

"If you would just give him his dinner I'll bring the things to the door—if you will take them in."

"Yes, of course I will. And I'll tell you what I'll do. I will ask him to luncheon to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you. That will be a great help. Won't it be frightfully tiresome to have him for two hours?"

"No, he is rather a curious study."

"I daresay he is. Perhaps after all you may be a deliverer for the captive princess, or Cinderella."

This with a sudden upward glance, both pathetic and inviting, from her velvety, soft brown eyes. It thrilled him with a strange recognition of power and sweetness in the soul that sent it forth conquering and to conquer.

"I should like to try more than I can say."

"I'll bring you some of the horrid cold meat which you like so much over here. That's all I have for him, and a little *chou fleur au gratin*. What an impossible attempt to try and manage a man who does not care what he eats!"

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She turned and disappeared before he could reply.

Brook addressed himself to persuade his old chum to eat and drink.

"Let me go out and get you a bottle of wine. There must be some place near where I can get such a thing?"

"Wine? No, no. I do not want anything of the kind. I rarely taste wine. If I should need it I have enough in the house, what I found in it nearly forty-four years ago."

"Let me get you some now," urged Brook. "Though you have not had any great shock you really need a little stimulant."

"No great shock! I wonder what could be greater, unless her death. I cannot buy and prepare my own food. I cannot keep the miserable little niggling accounts she manages so well; and then she stood between me and that ill-omened child, whose eyes I dread. They remind me—aye! they remind me of other eyes that were yet so different. Eyes that never looked unkindly; *these* hate me. I tell you they do."

"This is quite a morbid fancy, my dear sir. You must throw it off. You might really have a very useful, bright little companion in Miss Ardell, if you choose. She is a very capable, likeable young lady. She cannot cost you much, and if you cannot reconcile yourself to her you had better board her with some family. It is a desperate experiment to live in the house with anyone who sets your nerves on edge."

"Don't talk of impossibilities. I tell you I am not

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going to ruin myself for my son's daughter—my son who destroyed my life. No, no, no!"

"After all, Miss Ardell's only offence, as far as I can make out, is that she lives and has the needs of a human being."

"Enough, enough! Do not waste your time here. You are very good to stay with me. I am obliged to you, but I would rather you did not stay."

"Well, Mr. Ardell, I will not intrude upon you. I have promised to bring you one more dish. It is early. How shall you pass the evening?"

"As I always pass it. I have my account-books; I have letters to write; I have my journal. I shall go to my room. Tell that girl not to disturb me."

Here a light knock at the door called Brook to receive Madge's *chef d'œuvre*, the *chou fleur au gratin*.

The old man probed it with his fork, looking suspiciously at the delicately browned breadcrumbs piled in the middle.

"This is too fine and costly a dish for me," he growled.

"It looks very good. Try and eat some."

The old man tried the savoury compound and seemed satisfied.

"It will be a trying time while Mrs. Pinnock is laid up. Pray come and lunch with me to-morrow. I'll not offer you too luxurious a meal, something quite simple. Meet me at my office at 1.30, and put yourself into my hands."

"I am much obliged to you," returned Ardell, who had quite a store of good manners, which, like his

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money, were generally kept out of sight. "Perhaps you could give me a little information respecting one or two matters—but I will tell you to-morrow."

"Very glad to be of use to you in any way, Mr. Ardell."

"Then tell that—that girl to put the lamp in my room and see it is full. Also leave a fresh match-box, and I shall want nothing more, nothing whatever. Good-night, good-night. Very much obliged."

Brook shook hands with him and left the room, wondering how he could manage to summon Margaret, when, to his relief, he saw her sitting in the outer hall, her skirt in its normal position, her sleeves turned down again.

"Oh, Miss Ardell, I want to say a word or two. Your grandfather wants his lamp filled and put in his room."

"Mrs. Pinnock did all that before she fell downstairs."

"My dear Miss Ardell, I am greatly concerned at the idea of your being alone with your patient all night. I could easily find a nurse, or——"

"I do not think it is necessary. Mrs. Pinnock's ankle is nicely bandaged, and she is comfortable. I have plenty of lemonade, and we will get through the night quite well. In the day I must have help and I have secured it. Mr. Ardell would have a right to complain if I had a nurse. I don't like him, but his disliking me so much is inconvenient. How can I overcome it? You know him well."

"I do, but it is very hard to advise you. I must

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contrive to have a long private talk with you. You will be at home considerably for the next few days?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then I shall manage it. If you will confide in me I may be able to do you substantial service. I feel as if fate had put you and your fortunes in my hands."

Madge laughed low, shewing a perfect range of small, pearly white teeth.

"Oh, I will confide in you fast enough. I have uncommonly little to confide. But you must go now, and, believe me, I am not ungrateful." She gave him her hand, looking up into his eyes with a glance, half-caressing, half-defiant. "Shall I let you out, my knight-protector?"

"If you please. Why, you don't half believe me——"

"I am not quite sure."

Brook pressed her long slender hand and said: "We *must* understand each other," and he passed through the door she held open.

Brook turned his steps westward and strolled leisurely along. "One never knows," he mused. "When I picked up that queer, imaginative old miser on board the penny boat I never suspected there was something of a romance entwined in his sordid history. That granddaughter of his is a curious little creature. She suggests all sorts of possibilities. She may be good, or more likely bad, but she will always have something to give which you'd like to have and cannot be sure of getting. At any rate, I do not fancy she will ever have any of her grand-

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father's money. And I am wasting brain-power thinking about her."

Meantime, Madge made up her mind to address her grandfather, so opening the dining-room door softly, she entered, but immediately drew back.

"I beg your pardon. I will return when you go to your own room."

"Stay! I will go now, and you can clear away these things. Is Mrs. Pinnock any better?"

"Yes, she is easier. I hope she may get some sleep. The doctor says her quick recovery depends on her being kept perfectly still."

"Doctors are expensive, useless luxuries, and I hope Mrs. Pinnock remembers I am not bound to pay him!"

"She does, I assure you."

"How do you know that?"

"I heard her tell him to give all directions and a prescription that will do for some time, as she could not afford another visit."

"Good. She is a very sensible woman."

"But we must have help. I would rather pay Mrs. Dabbs myself than try to do without her."

"Pay Mrs. Dabbs yourself?" repeated the old man, eagerly, coming a step nearer to her. "Have you any money? Mrs. Pinnock said you hadn't a penny."

"She was nearly right! A couple of pounds is scarcely a provision for life."

"Have you—have you two pounds—forty shillings—eh?"

"Yes, and a few shillings more."

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"And a few shillings? Well, what's your name, eh?"

"Margaret."

"Then, Margaret, give it to me. I'll take care of it for you—good care. You shall not waste it, as young people are so ready to do. Give it to me, my dear."

Madge looked very sternly and searchingly at him.

"No," she said, "I will not."

"But you must remember that in fact you owe it to me—absolutely owe it! Since you came here—how long ago? Three months—yes, quite three months—I have provided you with lodging and food and fire to cook with, a beautiful large room, and excellent—even luxurious—food. Why, if you gave me all your forty, or say forty-five shillings, you would still be in my debt, heavily in my debt."

Still gazing at him, though her expression softened considerably, Madge shook her head and repeated her very decided "No." "You took me in out of charity, for which I thank you very much, but I never agreed to give you anything in return. I am very sorry to be a burden to you—as I know I am—and I often wonder what I could do to relieve you."

"Yes, yes," he returned, earnestly; "go on."

"You know I was working at a studio in Paris, and all I care to do, all I can ever do, is to draw and paint. I had only just begun to paint: my teachers have all said I have ability, and I am never so happy as when at work. Of course, I never hope to be a high-class artist: I do not know that any woman ever

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has been, but I could understand my art, and might make a living by teaching. But unless I am taught myself, I never can. If you will lend me the money to do this, I will give you the half of everything I earn. You may trust me."

"Trust, trust! Do not talk such foolishness to me! Who would pay you for lessons? You do not seem able to do anything."

"Not much at present, I admit, but——"

"I cannot listen. You must believe me mad to ask such a thing! And don't look at me in that fixed, threatening way. I won't have it, I tell you!"

"I will not if you dislike my eyes," returned Madge, with unusual gentleness. "Will you think of what I have said, and——"

"No, no, no! I'll try to forget it!" he interrupted. "Try to forget your audacity."

Madge sighed, and began to put the dinner things on a tray.

"Is my lamp ready?" asked Mr. Ardell, after watching her for a minute or two.

"It is. And I have put the matches beside it."

Mr. Ardell rose and shuffled about the room, collecting one or two newspapers, and picking up a pair of carpet slippers from a corner, where they were habitually hidden.

"Shall I take off your boots?" asked Madge. "I know Mrs. Pinnock always does! It is tiresome to stoop."

"No. Yes. Well—you may if you like."

He sat down, and his granddaughter gently un-

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laced his boots. He remained very still and when Madge removed the last, she asked, softly:

"Why do you dislike me so much? Could you not try to bear with me, and let me try to be of use to you?"

He stared at her, as if frightened, and then said in a low voice—almost a whisper: "Let me go, let me go!"

Madge rose and stood back out of his way, and the old man, his papers and one or two long envelopes, the covers, apparently, of reports or prospectuses, hugged up to his breast, hurried out of the room with feeble speed. His granddaughter kept quite still for a minute or two, her hands clasped and dropped before her, in deep, sad thought.

"He cannot be sane," she mused. "I am sorry for him; he must have had a miserable life, I suppose. He will make mine pretty miserable, too, if I do not get away from him; and I do not want to live, if I cannot enjoy life. I am woefully helpless. I wonder if Constance could help me to do something. That artist friend of Mrs. Pinnock's is perhaps more likely to do so, and *he* is so kind and friendly, I am sure he is poor. I ought not to take all and give nothing!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

HAVING come to this conclusion, Madge applied herself to carry away the remains of dinner and then to "wash up," following, more or less imperfectly, the directions of her friend and patient.

Then she attended to Mrs. Pinnock, bathed her ankle and replaced the bandage deftly.

"I don't know how to thank you enough, my dear," exclaimed the housekeeper, warmly. "Though you are not exactly what one can call tidy, in an ordinary way, you handle my poor foot as if you had walked the hospitals."

"If I cannot be a painter I should like to be a nurse," returned Madge.

"Talking of painting, won't you write and tell that nice, friendly gentleman, as came here from my boy, that I am laid up and we cannot go and see him?"

"Yes, I must. But I'll say we'll come another day. I cannot let him go, Pinny."

"No, Miss Margaret. Did you speak up to the master?"

"Yes, I did, and it's no use. I shall ask Mr. Brook to speak for me. Mr. Ardell seems to be fond of him."

Mrs. Pinnock was better and had risen from her enforced recumbency and limped with the help of a chair back to a seat in the kitchen, when one morning Mr. Ardell said to his granddaughter, as she was taking away his breakfast things:

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"Let me have my dinner half-an-hour earlier than usual." He spoke without raising his eyes from a letter he was reading.

Madge said "Very well," and descended to enjoin punctuality on Mrs. Dabbs, and to send her for some ingredients for a dish of French beans, which Madge herself cooked in a fashion approved by her grandfather.

Mr. Ardell started out soon after the midday meal. He had scarcely been gone a quarter-of-an hour when the post brought a brief note addressed to Madge.

"DEAR MISS ARDELL,—I hope to call between two and three this afternoon.

"Yours faithfully,

"H. C. BROOK."

Madge drew a long breath. "I shall put on my black silk, though it is not much use. My grandfather will be sure to return and I shall have no chance of speaking to him."

However, Madge had hardly finished her toilet when a loud ring called her to the front door, which she opened to admit Brook.

He came in smiling, but behind the smile there was a serious look in his eyes.

Madge felt annoyed with herself, for she knew that her own expression was radiant, and she was a little uneasy at betraying her joy.

"Thank you so much for coming. I am only afraid Mr. Ardell will return very soon."

"No; I made sure of that before I came. He

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will not return till after four o'clock—time enough to hatch any amount of treason." And Brook followed Madge into the dining-room. "How have you been faring this last week? You look tired. There are shadows under your eyes, as if you had not slept."

"Yes, I have slept, except for the first two nights, when poor Mrs. Pinnock was in such pain. She is much better."

"And what have you been doing with your grandfather?"

"Nothing!"

"Have you tried?"

"I have. Tried very hard." And she proceeded to repeat her conversation with her grandfather the day Brook had brought him home.

"And you really think you can do well enough to make a living by your pencil or brush?"

"If I cannot I had better die."

"My dear little girl, that is easy to say. Could I see any of your work?"

"Yes. I have a large portfolio full in the dusty, desolate drawing-room. Mrs. Pinnock said I might put it there in case a friend of hers, an artist, should like to see my sketches."

"I don't know that I am much of a critic, but I have seen some of the best pictures in the world and quantities which are not the best. Shall we go up and see them?"

"Oh, yes! And do not mind what you say. I am not an easily-offended idiot. Come."

She had not taken a seat, though Brook had

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placed himself on a black, stern-looking sofa. He rose and followed her up the echoing, carpetless stone stairs to the large, lofty, empty drawing-room.

Madge proceeded to draw up the blinds, yellow with age and years of washing, and a strong north light streamed in.

An old-fashioned round table and two carved oak chairs were the only articles of furniture in the bare-looking room. They were placed side by side near the table, and between them supported a large portfolio, evidently filled to bursting.

"I must shew you a few of these first, that I had begun painting some months ago. It is so delightful to use colour—only too tempting. One is inclined to neglect drawing for it."

She moved one of the heavy chairs back to allow of extricating the drawings from the portfolio, laying the specimens she selected one after another on the table. Bits of woodland, wide stretches of country, studies of rocks, roughly sketched figures and heads of children on coarse brown paper, carefully drawn still-life subjects, carved cabinets, decorations, and a great variety of studies in black and white.

"Oh, that is enough!" exclaimed Madge at length. "Your head will ache gazing at all these daubs. There! Do you know who that is meant for?" She placed her crayon portrait of Mrs. Pinnock before Brook.

"I should think I did!" he exclaimed. "That is the most satisfactory example of all, though not the best, perhaps. If you can catch a likeness—a favour-

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able likeness—you are almost sure to win custom. Here the weakness of the flesh will befriend you; the charming little vanities of human nature will be an unfailing means of success. I repeat that I am no judge, and do not pretend to criticise, but I did not expect to see anything so good as these. Have you anything in oils?"

"The merest beginnings!"

"Would it trouble you to let me see them?"

"No, of course not."

She went quickly away, and returned with two or three canvases, studies of trees, of rugged walls, and one or two of stones and water. They were extremely crude, and Brook did not give much attention to them. He turned again to the drawings.

"There can be no doubt you have ability," he said at length. "It is infamous to deprive you of the chances you might find in art. The question is how shall we persuade Ardell, your grandfather, to hear reason?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Madge, despondently.

"I must think out some scheme. I have often had to do so. Once convince your grandfather that you can make money, and like to make it, that the 'yellow fiend' is propitious to you, and he might make you his heir, perhaps."

"And he is really rich?" asked Madge, thoughtfully.

"Riches are relative, and I am not intimately acquainted with Mr. Ardell's affairs; but a man can hardly struggle to heap up riches and spend next

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to nothing for forty years or more and escape being rich. Do you long for wealth?"

"I don't think I long for anything," she answered, with a sigh. "I should be brighter and happier if I did. There would be something to live and fight for. When I was young I longed to be a great painter, or a very lovely woman. Now I know more, and have seen more, I am aware I can never be either."

Brook looked at her steadily, but, not being a commonplace man, he refrained from a complimentary reply.

"You can hope to be great, and work to be great, which are the first steps to greatness. As to loveliness, some comparatively plain women have, by the magnetism, the irresistible magnetism of charm, left the beauties far behind. At your delightful age you should leave the future to itself, and be content to enjoy the present."

"I have so much to enjoy in the present! As to the delightfulness of my age, you are not so much older yourself."

"Oh, beside *you* I feel quite venerable."

Madge shook her head mournfully, and gazed through the high, narrow windows of the Queen Anne type which occupied one side of the room with an expression of sad longing in her soft brown eyes, which Brook thought amply atoned for any deficiencies.

"It is woefully dull and depressing for you in this melancholy abode!" he said, kindly. "Suppose I

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ask your grandfather to let me take you to the theatre some evening?"

"You are wonderfully good to me!" exclaimed Madge, with a sudden outburst of gratitude, very unusual with her. "I cannot express what I feel very well, but I *do* feel."

"I can well believe it," thought Brook, meeting her eyes with a sympathetic glance.

"I do, indeed," pursued Madge, beginning to put away her drawings. "But don't waste your time asking my grandfather to let me go with you to the theatre. I shall be only too delighted, and give myself leave fast enough! Keep all your thoughts, all your brain power, dear Mr. Brook, to persuade him to pay for my lessons. The sort of lessons I mean, that is, to attend some studio—where I shall want brushes and paints and canvas, and—oh! heaps of things. You will never succeed, I fear!"

"I shall certainly make the attempt. Already a lovely scheme is dawning upon me. It will take a little time to mature, but you must trust me."

"I will! I do! I feel you are my only friend—except Mrs. Pinnock. She has been more to me than I can describe. Only for her, I should have killed myself, or my grandfather, the first week I was here."

"Are you such a desperate young woman?" asked Brook, with an indulgent smile, but conscious of a curious thrill that shivered through him at the fire which gleamed for an instant in her eyes, the passion in her low, rich tones. "I am half afraid of you!"

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"Afraid? No, you laugh at me, and I deserve it. I always deserve it when I let myself go. I do not often shew the weakness of violence in this way. I always repent it when I do."

"Not, I hope, when you shew your natural anger and despondency to *me*? I think that already I understand you."

"If you do, it is more than I do myself. Now, we had better go downstairs again. I don't think Mr. Ardell would like you to come up here except to see him."

"Perhaps so! Well, Miss Ardell, when I have thought out my scheme, can I write to you, to give you an idea what it is and how you can second me?"

"Oh, yes! I might correspond with Beelzebub for all Mr. Ardell would care! Don't you think Satan's letters would be very *spirituel*? I do."

"Some fellow once wrote 'Letters from Hell,' returned Brook, laughing.

"They would be quite different, and rather dreary, full of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

This speech brought them to the hall, and, seeing that Madge looked a little uneasy, Brook rather reluctantly said good-bye and departed.

When she was alone, Madge sat down in the sacred dining-room, and thought long and rather confusedly. She felt a sensation of vague hope mixed with pleasure, which had long been unknown to her. Brook gave her an impression of power, of being able to lift her out of the cruel abyss into which she had fallen. He was a smiling, civil,

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smooth-tongued, ordinary, well-dressed man of business. Yet he filled her with confidence in his force of will, his experience, his readiness to befriend her.

Presently Mrs. Pinnock, now convalescent—for it was nearly three weeks since she had sprained her ankle—limped into the room.

"Well, Miss Margaret, we are getting on!" she exclaimed. "Here's a letter for you, written so nice and pretty, and one for me into the bargain! That artist gentleman my boy wrote to me about has been away, and only found the note you wrote telling him we could not go and see his place, on account of my accident, when he came back. He does write so kind, and asks us to name another day. You will fix one, won't you, Miss Margaret?"

But Margaret was deep in her note.

"It is from Constance—Mrs. Grey, I mean. She wants me to go to tea with her any afternoon before the 30th, as her husband will be away till that date."

"A nasty, jealous, cantankerous creature, I'm sure! Why does he want to shut her up?"

"She seems extremely fond of him," said Madge.

"And," resumed Mrs. Pinnock, "here's Mr. Waring writing to beg you will fix your own time to look at his pictures."

"We are quite in request, Pinny dear!" cried Madge, laughing.

"I wish you'd laugh oftener, miss!" said Mrs. Pinnock, admiringly. "You look another creature when you do."

"I had forgotten how. But for some unreason-

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able reason, I feel a little wintry gleam of hope to-day."

"So do I, Miss Margaret. I dreamt last night that my precious boy was coming home next week."

"I hope he will, I am sure. Now, tell me, what day shall we go to see Mr. Waring's studio?"

After some calculation as to the next periodical visit of Mrs. Dabbs, the charwoman, Wednesday in the following week was decided on, and Madge went to her own room to write for "partner and self" with her usual swift illegibility.

Having secured this important appointment, she wrote a few grateful lines to her recovered school-friend. Then, pushing her letters, envelopes and a ragged scrap of blotting-paper into a much-rubbed, shabby writing book, she rested her elbows on the table, and her small firm chin in the hollow of her palms. She recalled what seemed to her the *events* of the day.

"Nothing striking or strange!" she thought. Mr. Brook is sorry for such an unfortunate miserable little creature as I am, and will try to help me. But will he remember his promises to me. Perhaps—for a while, at any rate. What an idiot I am to sit here, wasting time over a lot of unanswerable questions! I will try to draw Cecil Brook's face from memory. If he keeps his word about taking me to the theatre, it will be quite heavenly. I do not fancy he will forget."

She rose, and, going into the empty drawing-room, which was next her own, she began to search for a clean piece of cardboard, which, when found,

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she carried into her special apartment, collected her pencils, and set to work to reproduce the features which had stamped themselves so vividly on her imagination, becoming so absorbed that she disregarded Mrs. Pinnock's bell for tea, and worked on till the warm shadows of a July night began to close around her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Ardell always had his breakfast in his own room, so Madge ate hers in dignified solitude. To her great joy she found a letter on the following morning lying beside her teacup. She opened it swiftly. It ran:

"DEAR MISS ARDELL,—I have nearly matured my plans, and hope to see Mr. Ardell in a day or two on (let me say) our business. I write this to let you know that it is not necessary for you to stay on the chance of assisting at the interview. It might be better if you did not: I can write you the result. Also let you know when I shall make a second call."

"He has not forgotten!" murmured Madge to herself. "But he says nothing about the theatre. I suppose that will come. At all events, I shall go and see Constance to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XIV.

TO-MORROW"—with the usual variability of English weather—was dull and cloudy, with a cold, drizzling rain. Nevertheless, Madge set off early in the afternoon, taking advantage of a partial lifting of the clouds and cessation of the drizzle. She picked her way along the greasy streets to the Marylebone-road, saving a penny and catching an omnibus which set her down near a road which was close to her friend's abode.

She found Mrs. Grey sitting by a pleasant wood fire, which gave delightful cheerfulness to the damp, oppressive aspect of the day.

"So glad to see you, Madge," cried Mrs. Grey. "I was almost afraid you would not come. It is such horrid weather."

"It is too good a chance to lose. I want a talk with you so much."

"And it seems so long since you were here. How is your friend—Mrs.—I forget her name. Is she able to walk yet?"

"She can walk, but lamely."

"And are you better friends than you used to be with your grandfather?"

"Not much better; but I don't dislike him as much as I did. I begin to think he is not quite responsible, and I feel less inclined to fly out at him. That is a sort of relief, you know. And you, Constance? How is your little girl? I hope you have not ban-

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ished her because I am an unnatural monster and do not like children?"

"No, I assure you. I have given her a little treat to-day. She has another baby to tea and some new toys. So she will be quite happy in the seclusion of her nursery. I am so specially anxious to see you, because we are going to a little village in Switzerland, a sort of eyrie high up among the mountains. It is a favourite summer haunt of my husband's, on the Italian side, and as he will have some business in Italy I shall be nearer to him than if I stayed here."

"I should like to see your husband, Constance. Have you a photograph of him?"

"No. He never would be photographed," replied Mrs. Grey, colouring as she spoke. "I am very vexed that I cannot introduce you to him, but he is a little peculiar, though exceedingly nice. I am sure you would like him. But his visits here are so short, so hurried, and he has so much business of great importance to transact—business which obliges him to keep out of sight—that I cannot indulge myself by asking you to stay with us, as I am sure you know I would like to do, don't you, dear Madge?"

"I know *I* should like to stay with you. But what is the matter with Mr. Grey? He is not an Anarchist, is he? You said he was an engineer. Is he going to blow up Rome or Turin?"

Mrs. Grey laughed. "Oh, no. Bertie is always on the side of law and order, as people will find out one of these days. Now tell me, dear, about your own affairs. Are things looking a little brighter?"

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"Well, yes. I have just a little gleam of hope."

And Madge proceeded to tell her friend of her interview with a real artist, Mr. Waring, of his approval of Mrs. Pinnock's portrait, of his invitation to visit his studio, and the kind interest one of her grandfather's friends took in her work and how he had promised to help her.

"This all looks promising," said Mrs. Grey. "Is your artist friend young—or good looking?"

"I am not quite sure. I think he is younger than he looks, but he is certainly not good-looking. He is tall and big, with rather wild hair and keen grey eyes, looking out under bushy eyebrows, rather like a gigantic Skye terrier. But I fancy he is very kind, and I am dying to see his studio."

"Has he a wife?"

"I haven't a notion whether he has or not."

"Well, dear, do not fall in love with him. These benevolent artistic men are very dangerous."

"Are they? How is it that if a man is a little kind and civil to a girl, she is always supposed to fall in love with him? I am not at all disposed to such vagaries."

"Perhaps not, Madge. In fact, I do not fancy anyone ever knew what you are disposed to be or to do. I only wish you to make a good, happy marriage. There is no companion so delightful as a kind, sympathetic husband."

"Ah——" Madge hesitated. "That is if he has any brains."

"Well, men generally have more brains than women; at all events, they have seen more."

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"That's true, but—do you never grow tired of him?"

"No, oh, no! I sometimes fear he may grow tired of me."

"I suppose there is always a chance of that. His being away so much must be rather an advantage," said Madge, reflectively.

"Not in my opinion," cried Mrs. Grey, laughing. "Sometimes I wish he would tell me more of what he has seen and done while he was away. But I know he is mixed up with grave political matters, so I don't trouble him with questions. Latterly he has been especially silent, which means even more serious business than usual. But I hope to see more of him when we are in Switzerland."

"In your place I should be seriously jealous," ejaculated Madge.

"Not if you were married to a man like—my husband."

"You are constant by name and by nature, so you judge of others by yourself. I do not know that I am very constant, therefore I doubt."

"We always thought you a true-hearted girl at school. You were certainly a favourite. Do you remember the first day I went to 'Abend-brod' with you and your aunt? How good everything seemed."

The school-friends plunged into reminiscences which absorbed them both—of games and studies, feuds and friendships. At last they came to a pause, which Madge broke by asking:

"When do you start for Switzerland?"

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"Wednesday in next week."

"I suppose there is no use in asking you to write to me, Constance?"

"Not the least, dear. I am keeping very much out of sight at present. But in another year I hope to have a nice house of my own in town, when my dear husband will reap the reward of his work and waiting. I know you are the safest of little women, Madge, and will never mention our meeting to anyone."

"Yes, you may trust me," said Madge, slowly.

"When we return to London—if we do—I will let you know."

"If you do not where are you likely to go?"

"I am not very sure. Possibly to Russia."

"Russia! Oh, that is suggestive of Anarchists and underground dungeons, and all sorts of things."

"I am not afraid," Mrs. Grey was beginning, when the servant entered with a telegram. Mrs. Grey changed colour and hastily opened it. "No answer," she exclaimed when she had glanced at it. "It is from my husband," she continued. "He will arrive sooner than I expected, and hopes to be with me at seven this evening. He telegraphs from——"

She stopped abruptly, and Madge, divining the cause of her hesitation, exclaimed:

"Why, it is a quarter to six now! I will run away, and shall not expect to hear from you till a letter comes."

"I cannot ask you to stay, but you need not hurry

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away. See, Madge, I have a little present for you." She went to her writing-table and took a packet from it. "I have a purse for you, and trust it will bring you luck." She unrolled the paper and displayed a pretty green crocodile-skin purse bound with silver.

"It is a beauty!" cried Madge. "I hope it may not prove a mockery."

"I have ventured to put a little something in it, Madge, dear. Don't you remember, when I was weeping over my hopelessly shabby condition, our kind, good auntie (for she was mine as well as yours) gave me two beautiful English sovereigns and set me up for ever. My luck turned after that. Well, I have only repaid *you* what she gave, and a little silver as interest. Don't refuse, child. When your portraits are hung on the line you shall repay me."

"Refuse! No, that I shall not. But do you understand how grateful I am, though I am not able to say it? Now, are you sure it is no inconvenience?"

"Not in the least. My husband insists on my taking a dress allowance quite beyond what I need in our present position. Now I will let you go. My landlady is going out; she will take you by the back way and put you in a cab. It is raining, get away home. I wish you had a real home, my poor dear. But all will turn out right. That's what I always feel when my husband is coming."

A hearty kiss and Madge departed. She obeyed

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her friend's injunction, and felt prospectively rich as she jolted along in a four-wheeler. Yet she did not feel quite happy about her former schoolmate.

"I do hope she is not mixed up with something dreadful. Supposing this fascinating Mr. Grey is married! Suppose he is married to someone quite different. Constance is not the sort of woman to be comforted by punishing him. But she must be married, safe enough. That queer old father of hers seems to have been present at the ceremony, and he was far too sharp to be taken in. What a good thing it is he did not live to worry her."

Arrived at Osborne-place the front door was opened almost at the first touch of the bell, and Mrs. Pinnock's face presented itself with an eager expression.

"Come in, my dear. I hope you have not got wet. It's a horrid evening. I have been looking out for you this hour and more. Mr. Ardell is not at home. He went off to dine with Mr. Brook. What do you think of that? Mr. Brook called about four o'clock, just as the master had finished writing some letters (he got a heap to-day). He hadn't been long come when the parlour bell rang. 'Here,' says Mr. Ardell to me, 'you know where my granddaughter keeps her daubs, or drawings, or whatever they are? This gentleman wants to see them. Shew them to him.' It's just as well you gave me a word, Miss Margaret, for knowing you had no objection I walked him upstairs. It's not much he looked at them, of course; I knew he had spent nigh an hour turning them over the other day. He walked up

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and down, and stood meditating in one of the windows frowning to himself. Then he says: 'Thank you, Mrs. Pinnock that will do.' And downstairs he went quite brisk. The door was wide open as he spoke, and I heard him say: 'They are very good, Mr. Ardell, much better than I expected. I really think Miss Ardell has great ability.' With that your grandpapa gave a sort of grunt and said something about a draught. So Mr. Brook shut the door. He is a nice gentleman, that Mr. Brook, and a real friend of yours, Miss Margaret. Have you had tea, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, and lovely cake. I do not want anything more. I had a nice, pleasant couple of hours. We talked over our school-days and battles, and laughed and nearly cried, only I am not a crying character."

"And did you see the husband?" eagerly.

"No. But he is coming to fetch her and the baby for a trip abroad."

"Well, I hope he is a nice kind man to match such a sweet lady as she is!"

"Yes, he must be, from what she says," returned Madge, who rarely bestowed any unnecessary information on her interlocutors.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning Mrs. Pinnock suggested that Madge should take his breakfast to her grandfather, just to see if he would say anything respecting Brook's opinion of her work.

The old man was a very early riser, and was usually sitting at his bureau when Mrs. Pinnock en-

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tered his room. Here Madge found him, and was, as usual, conscious of being an intruder.

"I hope you don't mind my bringing your breakfast," she said.

He started at the sound of her soft, pleasant voice.

"Why do you bring it?" he asked abruptly, turning his thin, birdlike face and suspicious eyes towards her.

Madge hesitated a moment, and then spoke the truth.

"Mrs. Pinnock told me Mr. Brook was here yesterday, and went upstairs to see my drawings, and I am a little anxious to know what he thought of them."

"He knows nothing about such things—nothing at all! He says so. He said your things are good, but his opinion has no value. You are not the sort of creature to have talent—genius—and it takes a lot of genius to make money. Anyhow, he is going to bring a friend here in a day or two, a dealer in these sort of things. He'll put your pretensions to the money test. If *he* will pay money for one of your productions, I will have some little belief in you."

"Ah, then, I am sure I shall not stand the test. Only an artist—a real artist—could perceive promise in such a mere beginner as I am. I am sorry I troubled you. Do you want anything more?"

"No—wait. Can you speak truth?"

"I fancy I can, but I am not sure. I know myself very little."

"Would you like to make money? Look at me."

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"Would I like to make money?" returned Madge, opening her big brown eyes, and gazing full into his. "It is about all I long for. Where am I to find any, if I do not make it? By-and-bye, I shall be in rags; clothes do not last for ever. Where can I get others? By-and-bye, I shall want food: then I shall steal; hunger must be satisfied. By-and-bye, I shall be a beggar in the street, if I cannot earn something. And if I am not helped by someone, I shall go down—down."

"Then the 'yellow fiend' has you by the throat, eh? Ah! it is hard to fight with such a foe. If—if someone helped you—would you—would you share your gains with him?"

"Yes, of course! That would be common honesty."

"Go—leave me—I will think. Your eyes trouble me. There's something in them at times that I'd give my life to see again, and then comes a sneering devil. Go—go—go! You distract me."

Madge snatched up her tray and departed to Mrs. Pinnock.

"I am not a coward, Pinny," she said; "but I *am* afraid of Mr. Ardell. I do not think he is sane. I will not go near him again for a long time. Yet I am awfully sorry for him. I wish I knew his history. I believe, if I could bring him to have faith in my gifts, he would give me the means to study."

"And he may, my dear young lady. Did he tell you what Mr. Brook said of you?"

"No. He cannot bear to say or hear any good of me."

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That day, however, ended in a hopeful haze for Mrs. Pinnock and her young *protégée*. The evening post brought the confederates each a letter. Madge's said:

"So far, my plot has gone all right. I have now, with your grandfather's knowledge, made the acquaintance of your works of art. On Monday or Tuesday next I shall bring a real judge to pronounce upon them. Pray be at home. I shall try to get leave for you to come out with me to see some pictures. Follow my lead, and I shall manage. The more I see your work the more I like it.

"Yours very truly,

"H. C. BROOK."

Before she had quite reached the end, a joyous exclamation from Mrs. Pinnock attracted her attention. They were enjoying a frugal supper of bread and butter and radishes in the kitchen, with a jam turn-over for Madge's delectation.

"You have good news, too, Pinny?"

"Yes, I have. My dear, blessed boy will be in London on Sunday. He has had a long round this time—near six months. We must give him a real good dinner, and lots of vegetables. Mr. Ardell always knows he must dine with me on Sunday when he is in town. Won't he be pleased to find what a nice young lady I have to keep me company?"

"I should like to paint him," said Madge, pensively.

"Well, I am sure you will think him a good-looking young fellow, Miss Margaret. And that kind and considerate."

"Ah! Pinny dear, you are lucky to have someone belonging to you—someone you are glad to see."

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"Never mind, my dear. There will always be lots of people glad to see you, anyway."

"Do you think so?" said Madge, absently.

The two days which intervened between this joyful announcement and the appearance of Mrs. Pinnock's sailor son were busily employed in rubbing and polishing up all the kitchen tins and utensils, and preparing some dainty dishes for the welcome guest.

Mrs. Pinnock went upstairs in state to inform Mr. Ardell of her son's return, and ask leave to invite him. Her eccentric master scarcely took in what she said at first.

"Ah, your boy has come back, eh! How has he got on this time? Made any money? Has he a trifle to invest, eh? I daresay I might suggest something good, and as I'm not a regular broker, I'd only charge a trifle."

"I'm sure, sir, you are ever so good! But, you see, he is going to take the fifth of a share in a fine new steamer that's being built for his captain, so he'll want all the cash he can muster for that," replied Mrs. Pinnock, who had of late years become less reliant on her master's advice, not to say his honesty. For, as Mr. Ardell grew more and more of a recluse, the passion for accumulating grew upon him to a degree that swallowed up all other considerations.

"By no means a sound investment, Mrs. Pinnock, by no means," he returned. "I should not advise your son to sink any money in such an undertaking." Then, as she was leaving the room, he added:

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"If your son would like a little further advice, I shall be happy to give it to him."

Mrs. Pinnock thanked him, and beat as rapid a retreat as she could.

"Won't you dine with your grandpapa on Sunday, my lamb?" she said, as she met Madge on the kitchen stairs a little later.

"Ought I? Must I?" asked Madge, evidently puzzled and a little anxious. "Would you rather have your son all to yourself?"

"No, no, that's not it at all. But, my dear, it's another thing dining with your grandpa's housekeeper, all by ourselves, and you sitting down with me and my son."

"I do not see the difference. Why am I to punish my grandfather and myself for a mere idea? If you really don't mind, let me dine with you." And Mrs. Pinnock consented.

Allan Pinnock's appearance justified his mother's pride. A fine, bronzed young fellow, with laughing blue eyes, and curly fair hair, self-possessed, but modest, and ready to talk, though leaving it to the young lady, who was his superior, to take the lead. Neither he nor his mother's young *protégée* found any difficulty in keeping up a steady flow of conversation, especially on the subject of his artist friend, Dick Waring.

This led to the display of Mrs. Pinnock's portrait, with which her son professed himself enchanted.

Dinner over, however, Madge effaced herself, promising her good friend to keep watch and ward

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in the kitchen while mother and son enjoyed the unwonted pleasure of a walk together.

That night, when their sailor guest was gone, and the house locked up, Mrs. Pinnock tapped at Madge's door, and asked if she might come in for a few minutes.

"Yes, to be sure, Pinny! Has anything happened?"

"Well, no, my dear, but he has told me a secret that makes me uneasy. I know I'll not rest till I tell you."

"Oh, tell me, then!"

"You'll say nothing, and take no notice, Miss Margaret, my dear?"

"No, certainly not."

"Well, then, as we were a-sitting in the Park, my dear boy he opened his heart to me, and told me he was far gone in love with his owner's daughter, and I'm afraid he'll get nothing but sorrow out of it."

"His owner's daughter!" repeated Madge, a little puzzled by her expression.

"I mean the gentleman who owns the ship my Allan sails on. She is brought up in an elegant boarding-school, and though she may amuse herself with a good-looking young chap, no doubt she'll want to marry a gentleman."

"I would not trouble about it, my dear Pinny. They will work through it all, or break their hearts, whatever you try to do. Your son does not look like a man that would fail, and the girl may be honest and true. Believe me, all will end well till it ends the other way. We are, every one of us, helpless in the hands of fate."

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN early on Monday afternoon Mrs. Pinnock came to tell Madge that Mr. Brook and another gentleman were with Mr. Ardell, and that Mr. Brook had asked for her, Madge felt extraordinarily nervous, a most unusual condition for her, for the absence of hope generally gave her remarkable composure.

Mr. Ardell was seated in his large armchair with a newspaper in his hand, his usual company attitude. Brook was standing on the hearthrug leaning against the mantelpiece. A third man was sitting in front of her grandfather and smiling radiantly upon him. A thick-set, fleshly man, brown in colouring, with a hooked nose, glittering black eyes, and curly, oily-looking black hair. He was attired in new glossy clothes, and had an air of almost insolent prosperity.

"Good-morning, Miss Ardell," said Brook, advancing to shake hands with her. "This is my friend Mr. Marks, who is so good as to give me a few minutes of his valuable time to inspect your sketches. He is a well-known connoisseur. Mr. Marks, Miss Ardell."

Mr. Marks rose and made a short bow.

"You are very good, and I thank you," said Madge, with her soft and slightly foreign accent.

"You are very welcome, miss. According to my friend Brook here, you are likely to be a new Angelica Kauffman."

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Madge shook her head, saying: "Even Angelica Kauffman succeeded more by favour than by strength."

"That does not matter much, so long as she succeeded."

"Come, Mr. Marks, we must not detain you unnecessarily," said Brook. "May we go upstairs and look at your work?"

"Oh, yes, of course. You know your way, Mr. Brook. And need I go? I don't feel as if I could stand still and wait for judgment."

"No, no, you need not come."

Both men left the room. Madge sat down almost facing her grandfather, and listened with a throbbing pulse to the sound of their ascending feet, then to their steps overhead as they moved to and fro, probably trying to find the best light. Suddenly Mr. Ardell gave a sort of cackling laugh with a contemptuous tone in it.

"That fat Jew will bless Brook for bringing him all this way to look at a schoolgirl's daubs."

Madge made no reply. She scarcely heard what he said, though her eyes seemed riveted on his face.

"Don't stare like that!" he cried, in sudden anger.

"I beg your pardon. I did not know."

"I suppose you expect the great connoisseur to come down and declare you would be the wonder of the age, eh?"

"No, I do not. But if he says I have no gift, no power, I may make up my mind to take a housemaid's place; for whatever happens I cannot live here."

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Mr. Ardell spoke at some length in reply, but the sense of his words did not reach his granddaughter's mind, so intently did she listen for the returning steps of her judge. At last they came.

Madge could hear their voices taking cheerfully and laughing, rousing the echoes in the gruesome house.

Marks entered first. He held two sketches in his hand. One of a path through a pine wood, an opening in which gave the view of distant mountains; the other was a child's head on a piece of coarse brown paper.

"My dear sir," exclaimed the art critic to Mr. Ardell, "your granddaughter has a touch of genius. Good teaching and hard work would do wonders for her. These are full of promise. The distance in this is really excellent," holding up the pinewood sketch. "And so is this head of a suddenly awakened child. You see the little fellow has just opened his eyes. Yes, I like these. In fact, if you will part with them, my dear young lady, I do not mind making you an offer."

As Marks uttered this amazing sentence old Ardell sat up in his chair, pushed away his paper, and, stretching out his arms on the table, his withered hands clenched themselves, opening and shutting with nervous twitchings.

"Of course, I shall be only too glad to sell anything I have."

"Well, then," exclaimed Marks, with an air of generous abandonment, "just to encourage you, I'll give you twelve and sixpence for the two."

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"Thank you very much. You are extremely good," said Madge, simply.

"Of course, I do not pretend to understand such wares," began Mr. Ardell, with tremulous eagerness, "but as my granddaughter is as ignorant as myself I think it might be as well to take advice on the subject."

"Oh, just as you like. There's my offer, take it or leave it."

"I take it gratefully," put in Madge, before Mr. Ardell could speak again. "That a man like you should care to give anything for a drawing of mine is a strong recommendation."

"Well said, my dear," said Marks, familiarly. "I rather think you have the business faculty and that's a fortune in itself. Here's your money, my dear young lady." Closing his teeth on a cigar he had just lit, Mr. Marks dived into one of his trouser pockets and produced a handful of gold and silver, from which he picked out half-a-sovereign and half-a-crown. "May it bring you luck," he said, as he pushed it over to her.

"My first earnings," she returned, taking it with the brief, sweet smile that made so great a change in her usually quiet, sad little face.

"Well, I'll wish you good-day, Mr. Ardell. Very pleased to have had the pleasure of meeting you, sir. I have often heard of you. Good-day, Miss Ardell. Glad to have been your first customer."

Brook went with him to the door.

"Gad! You are a shrewd fellow, Mr. Brook. I fancy you have this concern in the hollow of your

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hand. Never saw a neater thing in female flesh than the granddaughter. If the old fellow would just give her the dibbs you'd carry everything before you."

When Brook returned to the dining-room Mr. Ardell still sat with his arms outstretched upon the table, but his hands had relaxed and lay limply, while Madge stood opposite him, a slight smile upon her lips and her eyes fixed on the bits of gold and silver which remained where Marks had placed them.

"Well, Mr. Ardell, I do not think your granddaughter overestimates herself. What do you say?"

"A man like your friend," returned Mr. Ardell, "would not give money down unless he thought an article worth that much, or more. I am surprised. I wonder now if this child, this Margaret, may yet find favour with the yellow fiend? It is all chance—mere, mere chance. You must not waste that bit of money, Margaret," and he laughed a queer, dry, mocking laugh. "Suppose now, suppose you give this money, and any other little bits you may gather, into my hands to keep just to help you, you know." He shifted his position and looked eagerly at her.

Madge picked up her money, and, laying it in the palm of her left hand, looked at it steadily for a moment.

"If I give you all I earn, will you help me to earn by letting me attend a studio and giving me sufficient clothes to appear in?"

She played with the pieces of money, letting them drop from the fingers of one hand into the palm of the other.

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"Neither of you ought to make a rash agreement," exclaimed Brook, who had looked on with great interest.

"No," said Madge. "I do not hesitate. I want to see if my grandfather's yellow fiend will befriend me. If he were kind to us both, grandpapa, how rich we should become? There, take it," and she passed over the money, which the old man greedily seized, ringing the half-sovereign on the table.

"I trust you to let me go to some class or studio; and please give me a receipt for twelve and sixpence."

Ardell gazed at her, his mouth slightly open. Then, with a sort of effort, exclaimed:

"Right, quite right. That is the proper spirit. Give me pen and ink and a scrap of paper."

There was a tussle over the wording of the acknowledgment, until Brook, who could hardly suppress his laughter, interfered.

"Do not waste this lovely afternoon," he said. "Just accept an acknowledgment of the amount received by Mr. Ardell. You have me as your witness as to what you are to get in exchange. I think, my dear sir, we can manage this severe young lady between us."

Ardell grinned.

"She has more sense than I thought, decidedly more sense. If she is lucky— But I'm afraid, Mr. Brook, I must leave you to write some letters of importance—great importance."

"Certainly, sir. One word more. Will you allow me to take your granddaughter to see the studio of

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a really great artist, a friend of mine? He might interest himself in Miss Ardell's studies."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Wherever you like, only she must not come and disturb me when she returns."

"Oh, of course not, certainly not. Good-morning, my dear sir, good-morning."

Brook held the door open, and the moment the old man had passed the threshold he exclaimed, in a carefully lowered tone:

"Excuse my familiarity, but pray put on your hat. I have a nice plan for the whole afternoon to wind up with the new play, 'Forging the Fetters.'"

"How delicious!" cried Madge, her eyes sparkling, her face dimpled with smiles. "I shall not keep you five minutes."

"Be sure you arrange with the housekeeper when you are to return, and that she shall be ready to let you in," said Brook, emphatically. "You must cultivate her carefully."

Madge nodded her assent and ran off.

Brook picked up the newspaper, and seating himself in the old man's chair fell into a fit of deep thought. Madge entered immediately, it seemed to him, and her little dainty figure, the Parisian style of her simple straw hat, surprised him.

"A sort of girl no man need be ashamed of being seen with," was his mental ejaculation.

"You are better than your word," he exclaimed. "Let us be off. It is a delicious day. Have you any place you would like to go to?" he asked.

"Dear Mr. Brook, I know nobody and nothing. I shall like any place you choose to take me to"

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"What a charming guest!" cried Brook.

They had left the house and were walking in the direction of Russell-square. Several cabs passed. At length he hailed a remarkably smart hansom with a good horse and handed Madge in, guarding her skirt from the wheel with scrupulous care.

They rattled down to Knightsbridge at a good pace, pulling up at a group of new studios near the beginning of Kensington High-street.

Brook threw open the doors of the hansom and sprang out, returning in a minute or two to say that his artist friend had already left town.

"You will think that I have lured you here under false pretences," he said, leaning against the shaft and looking up smilingly into her eyes.

"I do not care whether you have or not," she returned.

"I assure you I was quite unaware my friend would leave so soon. Now what shall we do? It is a few minutes past five, and there is nothing to be done before going to the theatre but to dine."

"I should like to see that park-like place we have just passed, with such fine old trees."

"Ah! Kensington Gardens. Good! We will stroll about and rest when you are tired. There is a side-gate a few yards off. We will dismiss our charioteer."

He helped her out, and in a few minutes they found themselves in the reposeful seclusion of Kensington Gardens. The day was warm and sunny. The shade of the trees, the perfume of the trodden grass, the beds of mignonette and hedges of sweet

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peas made a delightful atmosphere, and finding a pleasant shady seat they grew more and more confidential in their talk.

"Tell me," asked Brook, suddenly, "why did you let your rapacious relative sweep away the price of your pretty pictures?"

"Did you not see? It was a bid for my grandfather's favour. Just a suggestion that I, too, had some idea of a bargain. But I fear he dislikes me too much to be won over."

"It is well worth trying," returned Brook, looking at her compassionately. "But I hope to have many opportunities of consulting with you about your plans. To-day I want you to enjoy yourself. Do not think of the future; believe that all will go well. That will neither hinder nor hasten destiny. Besides, I am selfish. I have seized my last free afternoon in London for at least a month. I am going over to The Hague the day after to-morrow, and on my return——"

"You will find me mending my clothes and cooking the vegetables to help Mrs. Pinnock," put in Madge."

"I may have some information for you. At all events, you believe I am your friend?"

"Yes, I do. There is someone else I want to make a friend of who might be useful."

"Ah! you only care for useful friends, my Fräulein," said Brook, smiling. "Who is this fortunate individual?"

"An artist friend of Mrs. Pinnock's, or rather of her son. His name is Waring."

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"Waring!" repeated Brook, a good deal surprised.  
"Not Waring whose portrait of Lord H. has been so much admired in the Academy this year?"

"I do not know about that. He is a tall, big, reddish man."

"Yes, I fancy that must be Dick Waring."

"He said I must come with Mrs. Pinnock one day and see his pictures."

"The deuce he did?"

"Why? Is it not right? Is it worse than going to dine with you?"

"No, no, of course not. Only it seems amazing that you should have found another acquaintance."

Madge laughed low but merrily.

"Then, you see, we are both artists and understand each other."

Brook gazed at her steadily for a moment, and then, watching the soft faint colour rise in her cheek, said:

"I suspect there is a vein of devilry in your composition."

"Perhaps!" she returned, quietly.

"Come," said Brook, rising, "let us stroll away under the trees to the Bayswater-road. There we must think of dinner. What are your favourite dishes?"

"I cannot tell. My experience is limited. Order what you like yourself. I daresay you have very good taste."

"Your confidence is touching. I will do the best I can."

Brook always looked back to that afternoon's prolonged *tête-à-tête* with a sense of peculiar, pungent

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enjoyment. He seemed exploring a new and fascinating country, green and fresh, with sudden depths, all gloom and darkness. Then came sunny, rippling bays, where sirens might have sung and lured the unwary to destruction. There was such a curious mixture of recklessness and strength in his interesting companion. She seemed a creature whose strongest temptations would come from herself.

She was highly pleased with her dinner, eating daintily and with discrimination, also evincing profound interest in the composition of the dishes.

The play exhibited her in a new light. The plot told of the reunion of a couple, who, through early misunderstandings and want of self-control, flew for relief to the divorce-court, and meeting in after years renewed their attachment and were finally united.

Brook was surprised to see the effect some of the more touching situations produced on his companion. Big tears welled up, hung on her long eyelashes, and then slowly rolled down, while she seemed almost unconscious she was weeping. At last it was over and everything satisfactorily settled.

"I am afraid I made a fool of myself," murmured Madge, as they drove towards Osborne-place; "but I don't care much about it."

"It was a delicious suggestion of the natural sweetness you strive to conceal," said Brook, warmly.

"How silly those happy endings are!" exclaimed Madge. "In reality *he* would have married some

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urless, irreproachable fool, or *she* would have ded some prig who couldn't understand her, and i would be bound hand and foot in misery for ."

You appalling little pessimist!" cried Brook, ng her hand. "Promise me you will not indulge these gloomy thoughts when I am away?"

"I will not," said Madge, returning his hand sure, gently but unmistakably. "I will only k of the happy day I owe to you. Oh, I *have* ended it!" She drew her hand away.

As soon as I come back we must have another. an be easily managed. Probably Waring may gest an expedition; but do not be too ready to pt. I don't know much about him."

He seemed very nice. But he is so English. I k I should like you better."

*Merci*, mademoiselle! Shall we stop here and k the length of Osborne-place?"

Yes, certainly. Pinny said she would leave the gate unlocked and wait in the kitchen till I ed on the window."

Well arranged. Good-night. Remember I have hank you for a most charming day. I do not k you know what a delightful companion you "

Indeed I do not. Good-night."

he ran lightly down the steps and in another nent disappeared within the door.

"If I were wise," said Brook to himself, as he lled towards Holborn, "I'd never let myself look at little witch again. But I feel I shall not be . *Elle est plus fort que moi.*"

## CHAPTER XVI.

DICK WARING had reached that delightful turning-point in his career, when the road began to trend upwards. His portrait of the celebrated lawyer, which had been so highly praised in all the notices of the Royal Academy Exhibition, was his first important success, and already commissions had begun to pour in upon him.

As Madge had perceived, he was an extremely English Englishman, hard working, patient, resolute, with a certain confidence in himself, which was widely different from conceit.

He was very popular among a certain set of the Bohemian brotherhood, the men who loved and appreciated nature, and did not wear out their brains and imaginations trying to find more in her than her Maker put there. He painted what he saw faithfully, and as he was strongly sympathetic, he was particularly successful in portraits—men's portraits.

He had gone on living in the same house where he had, not without serious hesitation, first ventured to engage a studio, and as his fortunes improved, he gradually descended from his eyrie next the roof until at the present date he occupied the central position of both first and second floors, and was the most important tenant among the various occupiers of the old house in — Street, a well-known thoroughfare in the artist quarter near Tottenham Court-road.

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Waring's studio was very simply furnished, compared with the decorative elegance of most artistic *ateliers*. Some very good Oriental carpets, specimens of old English carved oak and some from the South of France, with an immense supply of quaint crockery, gathered from peasants' abodes along the coasts of Spain, Italy, and Dalmatia; some dainty little pictures, old bits of brocade, to make backgrounds, and a large piece of tapestry as a curtain to shelter a huge window, possessing a North light, which had absorbed two of the regular size, overlooking three or four mournful gardens, were among its principal contents.

It was a sunny morning, and Dick Waring was whistling as he worked at a small picture—two figures—in the dress of the Cavalier-Roundhead period. A demure Puritan maiden in grey and white was sitting in a richly-carved oaken chair. At her feet knelt a splendid cavalier, his feathered hat on the carpet beside him. His outstretched hands held a skein of silk, which the young lady was diligently winding.

The sitter's chair was occupied by an extremely slight, fair girl, with pale golden fluffy hair, who lounged in a sulky, sleepy fashion against the side.

"Do look more alive, Ella!" exclaimed Waring. "If you had a gallant cavalier, like that gentleman, at your feet, you would be as full of airs and graces as a cartful of peacocks!"

"You are very rude! I am no worse than my neighbours."

"I don't suppose you are. I just want to get in

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that arm of the chair with the end of your sleeve hanging over it. Then I will let you go."

"Very well. Do make haste!" Then, after a pause, she resumed. "Mrs. West has sent out cards for a fancy dress ball on the 30th. It will be the last fête of the season. I wish you would lend me this dress for it. I think it becomes me."

"Yes, it's the very thing. I don't mind if I do; but you must take care not to spill coffee or claret-cup over it."

"Oh, of course I'll take care." Another pause, broken by Waring this time.

"I expect two ladies to see me this afternoon. I wish you and your mother would come in to tea."

"Are they swells or models?"

"Neither. One is elderly, and comes to take care of the other. She is housekeeper to a rich old miser; the other is his granddaughter. He may leave her all his money. Then she will be a great heiress, and the society papers will write paragraphs about her. Or he may turn her out of doors, and let her die of starvation."

"What a horrible old creature!" cried Ella, deeply interested. "These cruel old men ought to be obliged by law to provide for their girl relatives. Is she pretty?"

"No—not a bit."

"That is a pity. If she were, you might marry her, and make friends with the miser. Anyone would be pleased to marry his daughter to you nowadays. Then you might have all the money. In fact,

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you might marry her anyhow; you do not care much about beauty. It is not so much matter at your age."

"Oh, no, of course not! At five-and-thirty one usually turns one's back on such vanities."

"Thirty-five! Why, I thought you were older than my father."

"In years I was his junior, but *he* really looked the younger of the two. You'll tell your mother, Ella?"

"Yes. I fancy she will come. She will be curious, so am I. Tell me, suppose the old miser gives her all his money, how much will she have?"

"Oh, I can't tell."

"Ten thousand a year?" persisted Ella.

"Ten thousand? Yes. Twenty, thirty—there's no saying how much."

"Good gracious! It is getting late, Uncle Dick, and I promised to take mother some strawberries for her dinner. I had better go."

"No, you must not stir for ten minutes. Get into position again. What a fidget you are!"

"You are so *exigeant*, and I get so sleepy."

Waring made no reply. He painted diligently for what seemed an age to his impatient sitter, and then suddenly laid aside his palette.

"You may go now," he said.

Whereupon Miss Ella stepped down from the platform and began to put on her hat.

"Of course," she said, "I am not sure that mother would like to meet the housekeeper. You know she is very particular."

"She can do as she likes," said Waring, indiffer-

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ently. "The housekeeper's son is a great chum of mine, and but for him, I should never have made acquaintance with the possible heiress."

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

After mature reflection, Madge, arrayed in her best, ventured into the lion's den; that is, her grandfather's room.

"I may as well ask his leave before I go out," she thought. "It's the right thing to do anyway."

"Come in!" cried Mr. Ardell, with a kind of snarl, when she knocked at his door.

"I came to tell you," began Madge. Her grandfather twisted his chair round to face her.

"What's the matter?" he asked, sharply and impatiently. "Is Mrs. Pinnock ill?"

"Oh, no. But I thought you would not mind my coming in to tell you that I am going to see some pictures. The artist is a friend of Mrs. Pinnock's, and she is coming to shew me the way."

"Come here!" was the very unexpected reply. Madge came over and stood beside him. "Look at me!"

Madge bent her big, soft brown eyes on his, unaware of the compassionate look which had stolen into them.

"Yes. You are like—more like than I thought. But it will not do. The fiend's ill-will was against *her*, and it may be against you. And no one—nothing is worth incurring his curse for. Every thing would go—all that I have built up."

"Do you believe, then, that I have brought you ill-luck?" she asked, gently.

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Mr. Ardell did not answer immediately. He seemed to think.

"No, I cannot say I think you have; but you disturb me—disturb me very much. Go away now. Send Mrs. Pinnock; I want my boots. I—you are going to see pictures? Remember, I will not pay for anything. Take some of your own daubs and sell them."

"Very well," returned Madge, submissively, and he left the room.

Mrs. Pinnock did not keep her long.

"The master is in a queer mood to-day. He has been thinking about you, my dear. Do you know, he asked me if I thought you were a good or an evil spirit, and said he fancied you were uncanny?"

"Poor old man! I wish he could like me. On the whole, he has a miserable life."

"That's true. Then he is so strange! He asked if you had a big appetite. Dear me! that's three o'clock striking, and I must not stay out long."

Madge and her chaperon were walking towards Waring's studio as they talked, and the anticipated joy of ranging through a studio, of inhaling the mingled odours of paint and oil, banished her grandfather and his crotchets from Madge's mind.

Mr. Waring was at home, they were informed by the servant who responded to their summons, and they were conducted upstairs, where, at the door of the magic apartment, Waring met them, and held back the heavy portière which screened the door on the inside.

"I began to be afraid I should never have the

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pleasure of shewing you my studio!" he exclaimed, when he had frankly and cordially welcomed them and inquired kindly about Mrs. Pinnock's injured ankle. "Now, I hope you will take a good look at it. I am glad it is a fairly bright day. This row of rough sketches are all of Hampstead Heath, a place a little over three miles away to the North. These were done on the river."

"What! Can you find such delightful 'bits' near this horrid, dirty, smoky town?" cried Madge.

"Wait till you have lived here ten years, and you will think as I do, there is no city like famous London town."

"Ten years!" repeated Madge, shutting her eyes. "I shall not be alive ten years hence! It seems horrible to look forward so far, and what a fearful old woman I shall be, if I *do* live to such an age!"

"My dear young lady, your pessimism frightens me! Such a speech is unfit for your young lips!" cried Waring, kindly. "Here is a little pot-boiler I was working at this morning. There is a girl who looks what a young creature ought to be. The original will be here directly." He turned round the easel on which the Puritan maiden was depicted.

Madge looked at it earnestly for a full minute. Then she said:

"That girl has a mother—probably a father. She may sit at home if she likes! Yes, it is an excellent subject for a pot-boiler. It suggests no disagreeable truths. It presents a pretty, inoffensive doll. I am very rude! You ought to send me out of your studio with ignominy. But you have some very charming

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things. There, that bit of wild sea-coast, the grey rocks, the sea dashing in amongst them, and the old fisherman looking out to sea through his glass—that tells a story!”

“I see you are an unsparing critic!”

“I do not know enough to be a critic. I have a few rough ideas. Alas! I shall never know much more. My grandfather is hopelessly averse to my studying, or rather to paying for my studies, although a friend of his and of mine brought a sort of dealer, a Mr. Marks, to look at my works, and he bought two sketches.”

“What!” cried Waring. “Did old Josh Marks give you money down for your sketches? This is a wonderful tribute to your ability. I congratulate you!”

“Yes. I was very pleased. Then I gave the money to my grandfather, hoping to put him in good humour. He took the gold, but will not help me!”

“What an infamous shame!” cried Waring. “But did Marks give you gold? Excuse me, it is not idle curiosity.”

“I do not mind if it is. He gave me twelve and sixpence for two drawings.”

“That will not break him. Come! We must defy the grandfather. You are welcome to work in my studio every afternoon; I keep the mornings for myself.”

“I do not think I ought to accept so great a favour when I have no means of——” Here the door opened to admit two ladies, and Madge’s lips closed.

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The new-comers were well but rather gaily dressed, and at first sight seemed much of the same age and size. Both had abundant golden fuzzy hair; both were brilliantly fair, with delicate pink cheeks and large, babyish blue eyes. A second glance shewed, however, that one was a little taller, a little plumper, a little pinkier, a trifle less babyish than the other. They were almost dressed alike. A delicate shade of lilac predominated in their toilets, but the hat of the taller and elder-looking one was more elaborate in its decoration, and she wore a fall of black net covered with tiny spots, which shewed her delicate complexion to great advantage.

"Oh, how do you do," said Waring. "Much obliged to you for coming early. Miss Ardell, this is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Waring. My niece, Miss Ella Waring. Mrs. Pinnock—Mrs. Waring, Miss Waring."

Mrs. Waring bent her head in a gracious fashion twice, her daughter offered her hand to Madge in a pretty, childish way, and the mother at once plunged into ready talk, first seating herself on a picturesque yellow velvet sofa.

"I was quite surprised to have my brother's message this morning," she said, addressing Madge. "You know—or must I tell you?—he is rather a surly, unapproachable sort of a lion, and I was quite surprised to hear he expected ladies to tea. So I said to Ella: 'We must stand by your uncle, my dear.' He is terribly shy!"

"Is he?" murmured Madge.

"Oh, yes. Never did himself justice. Now, of

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course, he can no longer hide his light under a bushel. *I* knew the time would come when he couldn't, and I have proved a true prophet."

While Mrs. Waring ran on, and her daughter listened open-mouthed and admiringly, the door again opened to admit the house servant, bearing a huge tray laden with tea-things, and plates piled with every description of cake, and a large Queen Anne tea-pot of a very motherly aspect. This was placed on a round table, which it completely absorbed, and Mrs. Waring ensconced herself behind it, the host devoting himself to Mrs. Pinnock.

"I had luncheon with your son to-day, Mrs. Pinnock, and am glad to find how well he is getting on. I fancy he will be one of our big shipowners one of these days. He is looking uncommonly well, too. He was giving me a curious account of your 'boss.' It must be a bad business for a young lady like Miss Ardell to live under his dreary rule. Will nothing make him hear reason?"

"No, sir, nothing. It would make your heart ache to see how she tries and tries to get round him, but it is no good at all."

"Ah, Mrs. Pinnock, we must manage to give her a chance, and you must help."

"Aye, that I will, sir, with all my heart."

"That picture Mr. Waring has just shewn me is a wonderful likeness of you," Madge was saying meantime to Ella. "Only you do not look so like a Puritan."

"Oh, no, of course not! I am an Anglican in my views, and detest the Puritans."

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"My little Ella is rather enthusiastic on these subjects," said her mother, carefully removing her veil. "Do you take sugar, Miss Ardell? I fancy you and my daughter will have some things—some tastes in common. Her uncle says she has a very pretty talent for drawing, though hardly sufficient application."

"Indeed!" cried Madge, much interested. "I should much like to see your work."

"Oh, it is not worth looking at," simpered Ella.

"Come along, Mrs. Pinnock. Sit here by this table, and take your tea in comfort," cried Waring. "When I attempt to sit out in the open, and hold my teacup in my hand, I generally upset it over my best new trousers!"

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed his niece, in a tone of remonstrance.

"I'm sure, sir, you are very good, but I must run away the minute I swallow my tea. Miss Margaret knows her way back, don't you, my dear?"

"Yes, quite well," returned Madge.

"Sorry you must go, Mrs. Pinnock," returned Waring. "But you may leave Miss Ardell to me. I'll see her safe home. Take another scone, and another cup of tea. Ella, the cream."

But Mrs. Pinnock was not to be persuaded to overstay her time, and Dick Waring escorted her himself to the door.

Then Miss Ella Waring's works were displayed and commented on. She had a nice touch and decided taste; Madge thought she could do much better than herself. So everyone was pleased.

Finally, Waring proposed that he should escort

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both young ladies to Hampstead the following afternoon as the weather seemed settled, and that all three should try to catch some sunset effects, and if they were fairly successful, make further appointments. Madge hesitated a good deal. She knew she had only a scrap or two of canvas, and two or three old brushes. How could she possibly throw herself on the bounty of a stranger! She must explain to him the state of artistic destitution to which she had been reduced. Still, for this one day she would enjoy the old delight of trying to reproduce nature.

At last, Mrs. Waring remembered that she was engaged to dinner, and must leave at once.

The whole party set out together, but soon separated, Mrs. Waring and her daughter to find an omnibus, Dick Waring and his charge to seek Osborne-place by a somewhat circuitous route, as he wished to point out some of the old landmarks of famous London town.

"To-morrow, then, at three o'clock, I shall hope to see you at my place, and we'll start to immortalise the famous Heath," were his last words.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THIS visit proved an auspicious event for Madge. Once more she enjoyed the dear delight of dabbling with paints and brushes, and revelled in the effort to transfer the first lovely tints of autumn to her canvas. Waring was a good and sympathetic teacher, and, if exacting in his demands on her care and accuracy, by no means discouraging.

He found the means, too, of reconciling his sensitive pupil to the acceptance of what she justly considered an immense obligation.

"You see I am very anxious to give my poor brother's daughter a good, that is, a useful education. Now, I fancy you could help her with German and French. The great thing is to get her to speak. If you will talk with her and give her some practice in that way, I shall consider myself amply repaid for any help I can give you."

"You are not the less generous," returned Madge. "But I fear I shall not find it easy to induce Miss Waring to speak either French or German with me."

"No, you will not. Ella is a hopeless idler. She is never in real earnest about anything but dress. She might make some money by painting flowers and Christmas-cards, or she might do still better. But she has no ambition. Now, *you* are too eager and too distrustful of yourself. You must study black and white; you might make your living in that way,

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and then indulge your fancy in colour. Colour is such a joy!"

"Yes, is it not? It is like music."

Waring and his new pupil were walking towards the Heath station, after putting Ella into a Tottenham Court-road omnibus, for Waring wished to introduce Madge to a friend of his who did a large amount of work in illustrating periodicals.

"You have been very well trained at the beginning, Miss Ardell," resumed Waring; "and your time has not been wasted. When I go away at the end of next month I shall give you and Ella the freedom of my studio and a task to do; then we'll see what we shall see."

"I find my hand rather rusty," returned Madge. "But what joy and hope you have given me!"

"I'm glad of that," he said, looking down on his slender companion with a sunny, kindly smile. "Don't let me hear any more pessimistic rubbish, my dear young lady. I'll see your pictures on the line yet, when I am beginning to be forgotten."

Madge laughed and gave him an answering glance as he paused at the door of an ivy-grown cottage, and after a few questions and answers exchanged with a servant girl, they were admitted and very kindly received by Waring's friend. Here they spent a pleasant half-hour, drinking tea and talking shop.

The whole aspect of life was changed for our despondent little heroine. She began to think she might possibly earn her bread some day by the exercise of what seemed to her a divine art. And

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though Ella Waring was provokingly indolent, she managed to induce her to speak German by dint of great perseverance and some flattery.

The rest of July and all August slipped swiftly and happily away, while Madge's horror of London was fading day by day. Yet she was puzzled by the strain of restless dissatisfaction which in her inmost heart she found warring against the mental tranquillity she felt ought to pervade her soul.

She was warmly grateful to Dick Waring, and eager to avail herself of his valuable help. But his conversation did not interest her or attract her attention. And at night she generally closed her eyes with a feeling of thankfulness that another day was done.

Being of a reflective, introspective nature, it was not long before she found the explanation of her mental state, and calmly took herself to task for weakness and folly. She was wearying for the sight of Brook's dark, keen face, for the sound of his pleasant, intellectual voice, for a glance from those expressive eyes of his, which could say so much and seemed to understand her so well.

It was a sincere joy to Mrs. Pinnock to see her dear Miss Margaret roll up her painting pinafore and one or two etceteras, which she carried to and fro, and start for the studio regularly after dinner. Sometimes she found it deserted, sometimes both the owner and his niece were there, sometimes Ella only, when she was usually in an indifferent temper.

"The weather is growing frightfully hot," she

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said one day, when Dick Waring was good-naturally grouping some of his picturesque belongings to form a "still life study," which his pupils might work at during his absence, as he had accepted an invitation for a week in the country. And laying down her palette she began to fan herself.

"It is quite too horrid to think we must stay in town all the season, isn't it?" she cried, appealing to Madge.

"Oh, I do not mind. Of course, I should prefer being in the Forest of Fontainebleau, for instance. But that cannot be, so I do not think about it."

"Like a wise girl," added Waring.

"Well, I cannot help thinking about it," said Ella, "when I see poor dear mother looking so ghastly ill. By the way, uncle, she wants to know if she may bring an old friend of my father's, a Mr. Martin, to see you and your pictures?"

"Martin!" repeated her uncle. "Is he the man on the Stock Exchange?"

"I think he is. He is very, very rich," returned Ella, solemnly.

"Yes, of course, he may come and buy as many pictures as he likes. Where did you meet him?"

"Oh, at the Andersons'—our rector's, you know. There was a concert in aid of the schoolhouse fund, and Mr. Martin, who had given very handsomely towards it, came with Mrs. Anderson and went back to supper. So mother said she remembered him, and they got talking about poor father, and I saw the tears in mother's eyes. A Sunday or two after, Mr. Martin called and took us to the Zoological

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Gardens. Now he is going down to a seaside place he has near Tenby, and wants us to try a month there. He says the air is very delightful."

"No doubt," remarked Waring, drily. "Pray, are you going?"

"Why, how could we? The journey there and back would cost quite ten or twelve pounds, and then board and lodging, and—— Oh! it is quite out of the question."

"I'm afraid so, Ella. Still, if your mother really wants a change we might manage Margate, which has finer air than Tenby, and you can get a second return fare for ten shillings. "

"Margate!" echoed Ella, an expression of deep disgust coming over her face.

"I suppose your grandfather manages to exist without change of air, Miss Ardell?" said Dick, standing back to consider his arrangement.

"I rather think change of any kind would be more likely to kill than to cure him. However, he has been much nicer to me of late. I sometimes hope he may end in liking me."

"That would be extraordinary," said Dick, with a good-humoured laugh. "You must try and please him, and not let him leave all his money to some stranger."

"I should certainly like some of it, but I am a great stranger to him."

"I suppose he has some old friends?"

"I do not think so. He has a young one who comes to see him occasionally, and has been very

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good to me. He brought Mr. Marks (who bought my sketches) to see my work."

"Yes, that was a real service. Now, young ladies, do you think you can do a good picture of this bit of still life? I will give you no hints. Just study it well, and reproduce it faithfully. I'll give a prize to the best of the two. If you like, you may come and work at ten o'clock in the morning all the time I am away. Soon it will be too late to begin at 2.30, but we'll see what is to be done. I must bid you good-bye for the present. Miss Ardell, you have done some very good, careful work. I think you are almost sure to make a living by your brush, but do not be too anxious about it. You are looking white and tired, my dear child. You, and this companion victim of yours, had better come down to Margate with me. We'll all sit on the pier and eat periwinkles with a big pin."

"Ah, uncle, you make me sick," cried Ella, with a grimace. "When shall you return? I want to tell mother."

"On Wednesday next, and Thursday she may trot out Martin. Then on Friday we'll fly to Margate, its pier and periwinkles."

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After the first day or two of Waring's absence his niece ceased to present herself at the studio, and left her first rough sketch of the "still life" subject untouched.

Madge rather enjoyed working alone. She studied every detail of her picture with profound attention, and, perhaps, unconsciously, put a sur-

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prising amount of expression into it. Her hours of work were also hours of freedom from the painful longing for a glimpse of Cecil Brook's attractive face, which made her heart burn with indignation against her weak self and thrill with pleasure at the prospect of soon beholding him. For, she thought, it is more than six weeks since he went away. He cannot be much longer; business never permits of long holidays.

It was the Saturday after Waring's departure, and Madge was busy in the studio. The afternoon was fine and sunny, and cheered by the idea that she was not doing so badly she was lingering over some last touches before returning to Osborne-place and tea with Mrs. Pinnock, when an elderly slavey, the *locum tenens* of the servant who had been given a few days' holiday, came suddenly into the room, a card in her grubby fingers, and saying "A gentleman for you, miss," laid it on a remote table and disappeared.

Madge, greatly surprised, turned to face the open door and stood motionless, a funny little square figure in her painting overall, besprinkled with dabs of paint, her palette in her hand. Yet it seemed quite right and natural that the visitor should be as he proved—Brook.

The idea came to her in a kind of electric flash, but she was not aware of the sudden gleam of joyous light which illuminated her face and made her large brown eyes gloriously beautiful for a second, at all events to the man who understood perfectly well the cause of their startling lustre.

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"I hope I am not an intrusive idiot for hunting you up in this way," exclaimed Brook, coming quickly across to where she stood and taking her hand in both his.

"How—how did you find me?" asked Madge, recovering herself quickly.

"I went to see your grandfather. He was out, so I asked for you. Mrs. Pinnock told me with glee that you were working at Mr. Waring's studio, gave me his address, and here I am—even at the risk of being summarily ejected from the artistic precinct."

"Mr. Waring is not in town, and even if he were he would be pleased to see any friend of mine," said Madge.

"Quite sure of that, are you?" returned Brook, with a searching glance, and in a very interrogative tone.

"Yes, quite sure. He knows I have very few."

"At present. Remember you only want the chance, and you'll make plenty. Well, this is a pleasant room compared with the melancholy desert in Osborne-place. What have you been doing? Any of your work to be seen?"

"Not a great deal. I have been trying very hard to learn how to work in black and white. And Mr. Waring has sent some of my efforts away to a friend of his who has promised to help me. Now, as you see, I am doing this '*still-leben*.'"

"It is uncommonly nice. I can see you have painted, so far, with all your heart. Does your new friend speak German?"

"Not very well. He has been more in France

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and speaks French better. But he is wonderfully good and kind."

"Yes? I suppose so—to you."

"To most people. Look!" turning the little "*genre*" picture before described, which was standing in a corner with its face to the wall.

"That's a charming little thing. What a sweet Puritan!"

"That is Ella Waring, his niece, and I rather think Mr. Waring has done everything for her since his only brother, Ella's father, died some years ago, and for the widow too. Ella studies here with me. I help her with French and German."

"Ah, I understand. The niece does propriety."

"Oh, no. I do not think *that* would be necessary—not to me at least. I am unconventional enough not to mind painting alone with any man. You do not know how absorbing art is."

"Oh, very likely. I may not know much about art, but I have known artists, and a deuced queer lot they are. Is there a portrait of your friend Waring anywhere about?"

"Yes, there is an old one somewhere," and Madge began to look among a number of dusty canvases that stood along the wall with their backs to the company, touching them with infinite care.

"Yes, here it is."

She lifted the sketch on to a large easel, turned it to the light, and dusted it gently.

"He looks older and larger and graver now," said Madge, contemplating it with interest.

"Not a bad-looking fellow," remarked Brook,

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after a moment's silence. "A regular Englishman, with a strong dash of the animal."

"I suppose that does not matter much," said Madge. "Some animals are faithful and loving."

"And many more are greedy, and self-indulgent, and sensual, etcetera."

Madge made no reply, but applied herself to put the portrait back in the place from which she had taken it.

"Do come and sit down. I want to ask you so many things," said Brook. "It seems ages since I saw you."

"Yes," she returned, coming back and sitting down on the yellow velvet sofa. "You stayed away longer than you intended. I have been hoping to hear something of you for the last ten days."

"Then you missed me—a little?" looking into her eyes.

"Missed you? Why, of course I did. You must always be my first friend. I shall always want to see you, and you know so much; twice as much as Mr. Waring."

"That is a proud distinction. Tell me, how have you got on with the grandfather?"

"Provokingly! There always seems a chance that he may like me. Then an indescribable something comes between us. Mr. Brook," with sudden earnestness, "I am quite—quite sure he is mad!"

"Are you?" returned Brook, and he fell into a fit of musing which lasted a minute or two. "I have had a similar suspicion more than once," he said at

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length, "but I am afraid it would be very difficult to prove it."

"Would you wish to prove it?"

"For some reasons, perhaps yes. It might make an enormous difference to you. Suppose he were unable to make a will?"

"I imagine he must have made one long ago. Do you think he would leave his 'yellow fiend' to chance?"

"I have some reason to believe he has made several. It is immensely difficult to ascertain what he has, and what he has not, done with his money."

"Why *I* think him mad is that I feel a sort of dread of him when he glares at me with those strange wild eyes of his. And yet a curious kind of pity seems to have banished the daring antagonism I felt against him when I first came. That man has suffered terribly. I seem to know it."

"I should not say you are a specially sympathetic woman, Madge. A thousand pardons! I always think of you as Madge, so it is hard to keep the name from my lips. For you are often in my thoughts, my sweet little friend."

"Call me Madge if you like," she returned, carelessly.

"Yes, I do like it. I like anything that seems to draw the links of our friendship closer."

Madge looked at him gravely for a moment, and a quiet, thoughtful smile stole over her face.

"Curious little creature!" thought Brook. "What does she doubt?" "Why do you smile?" he said aloud.

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"Because it seems so strange that you should care for my friendship. But I am exceedingly glad you do. Yet you don't give me the idea of a man to whom *anyone* would be essential."

"Essential is a strong word," he returned, suddenly remembering that he must put on the curb, and profoundly piqued to perceive that his little girlish chum seemed to have her feelings, or senses, better in hand than his more experienced self. "One can be sincerely interested in some attractive personality which yet is not essential to one's happiness."

"No doubt. I quite understand that," said Madge, with complete concurrence.

"One reason why I was so anxious to see you to-day," resumed Brook, after a short pause, "is because I have a delightful project for Sunday next. I promised a friend of mine, who is detained in Holland, to inspect a cottage of his at Weybridge, and ascertain if the caretaker is taking care of it. Now, as I suppose you still enjoy the sort of desolate freedom Mr. Ardell gave you, will you come with me if the weather is fine? It is a pretty spot, and the expedition will do you good. I shall not be in London again until the middle of October, so you must do me this favour."

"Of course I will. Thank you a thousand times for thinking of it. May I take my sketch-book?"

"Well, perhaps you had better not. I will explain afterwards. Will you meet me at the corner of Southampton-row at 10.30? We can have a delightful long day. You must make everything

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square with the housekeeper. By the way, do you think she is safe?"

"Safe? Yes, I am sure she is. But how do you mean?"

"She will not betray you to old Ardell?"

"There is nothing to betray. I do not mind the least who knows that I go to spend a day in the country with a friend, though the friend does happen to be a man."

"But I do," thought Brook.

"Bravo!" he said, aloud. "Then, people of your friend Mrs. Pinnock's class are accustomed to young men and women 'keeping company,' as they call it?"

"Oh, I suppose so," carelessly. "On Sunday, then, at 10.30, if fine!"

"You are the most puzzling little witch I ever met!" cried Brook, rising and taking her hand. "Good-bye, my sweet Madge. Pray the gods for fine weather."

"I will indeed! Good-bye."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Soon after a delightful day in the Pine Woods, where Madge and her confidential friend enjoyed the pleasure of exchanging thoughts, opinions, recollections, with all the understanding of sympathy, the sweetness of personal liking, a long spell of isolation set in.

The only gleam of light which relieved the gloom was Dick Waring's permission to use his studio, and the dim hope which kept her so diligent with her black and white work.

Waring, indeed, seemed the only person who remembered her. He sent occasional brief letters, for he was not given to writing, and gave Madge a droll picture of the finery and fashion assembled by Mr. Martin at his seaside abode (whither in the end he had gone with the Warings), and the ecstasy with which Ella entered into the novel pleasures of boating and riding, in a borrowed habit. Still time rolled on and August was well-nigh gone.

"Miss Margaret," said Mrs. Pinnock one morning, "will you put on your hat and go round to Dr. Felton? Your grandpapa caught a nasty cold yesterday, and he's that bad with a cough and wheezing, that I don't like to take any more responsibility. He'll be terrible angry when he sees the doctor, but I can't help that. I can't think how he's caught cold."

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"I will go at once!" cried Madge. "I do hope he is not going to be ill."

Mrs. Pinnock's anticipations were fully justified. The sight of the doctor roused Mr. Ardell to fury. He was—well—perfectly well. What did Mrs. Pinnock mean by such infernal audacity as to treat him like a baby? He'd trouble Dr. Felton to take notice that he (Ardell himself) had not sent for him, and was not responsible for any expenses incurred.

The doctor, however, knew his man. He had attended him before, and had his account satisfactorily settled by the old man's solicitor after several warnings.

"Come, come, my dear sir," he said, good-humouredly, "you ought to know by this time that I treat you on very favourable terms. If you do not let me attend you for this very serious attack, I'll not answer for the consequences. Why, anyone would say you were mad to dream of refusing medical assistance. Light a fire in Mr. Ardell's room at once, if you please. These autumn nights are chilly; and, anyway, we'll need it for the bronchitis kettle. Have you such a thing? Never mind, I'll lend you one. Please give me pen and ink."

These Madge hastened to place before him.

"I'll have you to know, sir," said Ardell, putting on an air of dignity, "that I am as sane as you are."

"I have no doubt of it—perhaps more so. Save on one point—your own health."

"Then pray avoid such allusions. Smaller suggestions have been made the means of secluding perfectly sound, sane men out of reach of their

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friends and advisers, and——” He had run on excitedly, and now stopped short.

“Pray, who do you suspect of such villainy?” asked the doctor, laughing; “this young lady, or myself, or—Mrs. Pinnock?”

The old man’s eager, restless eyes glanced at each one mentioned with pitiful suspicion.

“No, no, of course not, of course not! Old men get cranky, you know, doctor, but they needn’t be mad, eh? I wish you could see my accounts—there’s order and regularity for you! Not a blot or an erasure in a hundred pages.”

While he talked, Mrs. Pinnock disappeared to build the fire.

“At any rate, you have two capital nurses. I know what your housekeeper was when you had that touch of influenza a few years ago; and I saw how well this young lady could manage when Mrs. Pinnock sprained her ankle.”

This was the beginning of several weeks of very arduous nursing. At first there was prolonged night watching, but the worst period was when the patient began to feel returning strength and wanted to do everything for himself.

Half-way through this time of trouble, Madge was agitated, yet revived, by a visit from Brook. At first she thought her grandfather had written to him, but his look of surprise and uneasiness when she said how ill Mr. Ardell had been, convinced her that he had not had any tidings from Osborne-place.

“I can imagine the old man had a bad time of it

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from your ill looks. You have been wearing yourself out."

"I have shared Mrs. Pinnock's fatigues and cares. Then my grandfather did not write to you?"

"No. I came on the chance of seeing him and *you*. I thought it wiser, for more reasons than one, to abstain from coming till to-day. Besides, I have not been in London all the time since I saw you last."

"What a wanderer you are!" said Madge, with a smile.

"May I tell you the secret of my wanderings some day?"

"Yes, to be sure. And I can keep my lips closed."

"I can well believe that. That is one of the reasons why you are such a delightful companion, and might be such a useful——"

"Accomplice!" put in Madge, with smiling eyes.

"Accomplice?" he repeated, with sudden animation. "Precisely—exactly. Cool and guarded and silent. What more can man desire?"

"Pray how do you know I am all these? But I had better let Mr. Ardell know you are here. I fancy he has been wishing to see you, though he has not mentioned you. He has shewn me curious glimpses of himself, in the silent night watches, when he did not know who I was."

"And do you still think him slightly off the mental balance?" he asked, detaining her.

"Yes; more than ever!" And she went away to the old man.

Mr. Ardell brightened visibly when he heard that Brook wished to see him.

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"Remember, he is not to stay long. You are not to be excited."

"Oh, Brook will help me to keep quiet. He knows so much—so much of finance, and Stock Exchange secrets. A clever fellow—very clever! Got *you* twelve and sixpence. Let him come in."

"My grandfather will see you," said Madge, returning to the dining-room. "But do not stay long."

"No. Indeed, I have not much time. Pray let me find you here before I go."

Madge nodded assent, and conducted Brook to the next room. She placed a chair near to Mr. Ardell, whose hearing was not as keen as it used to be, and left them.

She could see that her grandfather brightened up at the sight of his visitor, and wondered for a minute or two what it was that attracted Brook to the old man. Possibly his money! Then, again, no sensible man of the world would count on the "unruly will" of so eccentric and unsatisfactory a miser. Whatever one wished him to do was, most probably, the very thing he would not.

The visit was, indeed, a short one—at least, it seemed so to Madge—although she sat with folded hands, waiting.

"The old man has had a shake," said Brook, walking over to the window, and back again. "No, thank you. I will not sit down. He looks greatly aged. But I fancy you have gained ground with him. He said you had deft fingers, and that he didn't see the 'yellow fiend' looking so often out of your eyes as he used. Nevertheless, I would not count on deriving

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much benefit from his last will and testament, my sweet little friend."

"Who—me?" in a tone of amazement. "I never give it a thought."

"Yet you are too sensible a girl not to know the value of money."

"I know the hatefulness of poverty better. What I should consider comfortable competence, *you* would think penury."

"I am not an extravagant fellow, Madge, but it is hard to gain anything of a position if you haven't the 'yellow fiend' at your back. Come, be confidential, Madge. I do not ask from mere curiosity—are you quite penniless?"

"Oh, no! I have still a big and a little gold piece, and a few shillings."

"Bravo! Now, have you any little sketches—pretty little bits that decorative householders might put up in morning rooms, or downstairs breakfast rooms? Just put them into cheap frames, and offer them, with or without frames, to that man Lewis, in Tottenham Court-road, half-way up on the left side. He is really an employé of Marks; and hold out for ten shillings each."

"Do you think he would give me all that?" cried Madge, opening her eyes.

"Try, and let me know the result. You want a little change—a breath of fresh air sadly. When can you steal a day in the country with me? I want a long talk with you."

"Oh, it is too delightful to think of!" cried Madge, impulsively. "But I could not leave my grand-

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father, and still less Mrs. Pinnock. There is a great deal to do for some time yet. I will tell you when I can."

"Very well. Be sure you do not forget. Now I must be off. Good-bye, my dear little girl. By the way, you like that housekeeper, I think?"

"Oh, yes. She is wonderfully good to me. I think I should have died without her."

"Yet you are not one of the clinging sort?"

"No; but no one can stand quite alone."

"Would it disappoint you very much if Mr. Ardell left everything to this friend of yours? Old men do queer things now and then."

"No; I should be glad. She would be sure to give me enough to live upon."

"Oh, woman, great is thy faith!" exclaimed Brook, shaking hands with a cynical smile. "Let me hear from you about the pictures."

The next minute Madge heard the house door close behind him, and, infinitely cheered, went away to warm a cup of beef-tea for the invalid.

She found that he had struggled across the room to his bureau, and had unlocked it. He had done no more, however, and sat gazing into its recesses.

"Pray do not tire yourself trying to do anything! Let me get the paper. I was going to read to you when Mr. Brook came in."

"Very well—read. I do not exactly know what I came to look for."

"If you tell me, I will try to find it for you."

"Will you? Eh, will you?" cried the old man, turning the key quickly and viciously. "Mark you, I'll not have you lay a finger upon it—not a finger!"

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"Very well. I promise not to touch it. Do please take your beef-tea."

Meanwhile, Brook hailed a hansom and drove quickly to the picture dealer's in Tottenham Court-road. There he talked for some little time with the manager, and next ordered the driver to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he had a long interview with Mr. Briggs, old Ardell's special adviser in the firm.

His face was generally set to the key he chose, but it looked a little brighter—a trifle less rigid—when he left the office and took his way past the Law Courts into the Strand, than when he asked if he could see Mr. Briggs.

During these trying days, Waring was not forgetful of his favourite pupil. He had written brief notes, sometimes hastily-scrawled post-cards, of inquiry and condolence. The first two or three had produced no reply, for Madge's hands were full, and she hated writing. But, seeing the tone of sincere interest and anxiety which pervaded Waring's effusions, she managed to send him more frequent reports. And, until Brook reappeared, this intermittent correspondence was her chief comfort.

The time at which she expected Waring to return and settle for the winter was now at hand, and still no word had reached her from her fellow-student, Ella. But this was no great disappointment: Ella did not convey an idea of constancy.

Now that Mr. Ardell was gathering strength, the doctor was extremely anxious that he should go out for a short drive two or three times, to accustom himself to the air, before venturing to walk. But it

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was impossible to persuade him that such a tremendous outlay could be necessary. He would go out for a few minutes, and Mrs. Pinnock would give him her arm. He would not have his granddaughter. No; a young, slim creature like that had no strength. "Besides"—and he went off into indistinct mutterings, amid which Mrs. Pinnock dimly distinguished the words: "Ill omen," "may be well disposed," "quite as likely not."

"Well, that's quite true, sir. A slim creature of her sort could not be the use to you I could be." And, making the best of his provoking opposition, the housekeeper prepared herself and her master for the trial trip on foot.

It was extremely brief, and the old man could hardly ascend the steps on his return; he was so exhausted. But he had gained his point; and a long sleep in his chair restored him considerably.

Brook called at intervals to inquire for and visit him. But Madge, unless she happened to be in the room when he came, rarely presented herself.

She did not fail, however, to select and touch up a few old sketches, made in the neighbourhood of Paris, and offer them to the Tottenham Court-road dealer. She did not consider that the work she had done under Waring's direction was her own to sell; certainly not without asking his permission. Her joy was great when she found herself the proud possessor of one pound ten in exchange for four pictures of various sizes—chiefly of woodland subjects. And hardly daring to speak to Brook on any subject in her grandfather's presence, or anywhere

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that a whisper could by any possibility reach his ear, she wrote to let her friend and patron know the result of his good advice.

Returning from posting this note, she nearly ran against a very smart young lady, who was coming round the corner from an opposite direction.

"O Madge! I was just going to the studio, hoping to see you."

"Miss Waring! When did you come back?"

"Oh, about a fortnight ago. We stayed longer than we intended, and had such a glorious time. Come with me. Mother hasn't an idea what has become of uncle. Do come."

Madge turned with her.

"I haven't been to the studio for a long time," she said. "My grandfather has been very seriously ill."

"Has he? I have not heard anything about anyone—at least, since uncle went away. He stayed only three weeks at Tenby, and certainly he made a splendid portrait of Mr. Martin, who was so delighted with himself on canvas. He is one of the nicest, kindest, most generous men that ever lived!"

"Who? Your uncle?"

"Oh, no! Uncle Dick was that cantankerous and disagreeable we were quite glad when he went away. But we had a lovely time for all that. Mr. Martin's sister was there, and her husband and three children, nice little things. Then several men came down from town, and we drove about, and sailed and rowed in the boat. And—but here we are! Do come in, and I'll tell you all about everything. Is

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my uncle at home?" This to the woman who opened the door.

"Oh, no, miss. He hasn't come back yet, and won't, missus says, for another fortnight."

"Well, I want to come in, and go up to the studio."

"Very well, miss. It's not to say very clean, but Mr. Waring he forbid us from laying a finger, much less a brush, on anything, till he came back."

"Never mind the dust. Come and sit down for a few minutes; I want to tell you about the delightful time we had at Tenby. Do you know, I have been learning to ride!"

She ran on with a fluent description of all her adventures, and the admiration she had met with; of the lovely dresses Mrs. Gifford, their host's sister, wore, &c., till Madge, who knew she could ill be spared, said good-bye and returned home.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE following afternoon Madge, who had been mourning over and endeavouring to arrest the decay of some of her garments, had put away her needle-work and made something of a renewed toilet as she thought of going to see Ella Waring, who had frequently asked her to call, when she was startled by a sharp, decided peal of the front door bell. She hastened to open the door and found Brook standing before it.

It struck her that he looked brighter and better than when last she had seen him. He had an air of alertness and decision which made him appear younger and seemed to revive her own spirit.

"So glad to see you," he exclaimed, taking her hand. "How is Mr. Ardell? Is he visible?"

"He is better and stronger, but just now I think he is sleeping. I will go and see."

"One moment. I am going to play a bold stroke; mind you back me!"

Madge opened her eyes with a questioning expression and went quietly into the dining-room, now a little less gloomy than in the summer time, for Mrs. Pinnock insisted on keeping up a fairly good fire, and the old man unconsciously enjoyed the comfort of sleeping in the warmth. He was awake, however, or partially awake when Madge went in.

"Who—who," he asked, "rang so loud?"

"Mr. Brook has called."

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"Oh, yes, of course I will see him. There's a log of wood there, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then you might put it on."

Madge complied, and ushered Brook into the room.

"Very glad to see you. What's your business to-day?"

"Nothing special. Have just looked in to see how you are going on. You seem better and stronger than when I was here last."

"Yes, I am, I am," murmured the old man. "I'll live to get rid of all doubtful securities yet. Tell Briggs I said so, and say I'd like to see him."

"He spoke of calling to-morrow," said Brook. "Now, Mr. Ardell, I am going to ask a personal favour. Will you allow Miss Ardell to come for a little excursion into the country under my charge? She looks white and weary. No doubt the anxiety of your illness, the strain of watching, has fatigued her, and a day in the country would do her a great deal of good."

"What time did Briggs say he would call?" was Mr. Ardell's not very relevant reply.

"Oh, after luncheon. But did you hear my suggestion?"

"Yes, to take that child Margaret into the country. Yes, but you must bring her back to this door, mind. I have no money to hire carriages for her, or——"

"My dear sir," interrupted Brook. "Do you think I should be so impolite, so undeserving to be trusted,

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as to let your granddaughter out of my sight until I restored her to your guardianship?"

"Oh, very well. If you like to spend your money in these sorts of follies I do not mind. Do as you please."

"Then as the weather promises to be settled, and I shall be leaving town on Saturday, will it suit you, Miss Ardell, to fix to-morrow? I will call for you here about twelve. I propose shewing you one of the 'stately homes of England,' the name of which you may know, Hatfield. It is not more than half-an-hour from King's Cross, and the park is quite charming at this season."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Brook. It will be a great treat for me," exclaimed Madge, her eyes aglow with pleasure, the colour creeping up over her pale cheeks as she met his responsive glance.

"Of course the pleasure is mine, eh, Mr. Ardell?"

"Pleasure!" repeated the old man, dreamily, with a faraway look. "I forget what it is. Something like what I used to think pleasure came to me sometimes in my sleep when I was ill, and I am sorry I ever woke up. Only"—confidentially to Brook—"I have still to get the better of my enemy, and I will!"

"No doubt," cheerfully. "A little longer and you will be quite out of his power."

"Ah, Brook, you are a clever fellow," with a sigh. "The day I feel I am quite safe I will sleep—sleep sound."

"You may do that already, my dear sir. You have most faithful attendants. Now I must leave. I have a good deal to do before I can earn my holiday to-morrow."

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Brook shook hands and departed. And as soon as she had brought her grandfather his tea Madge escaped to tell Mrs. Pinnock.

"Mr. Brook has actually asked my grandfather to let me go into the country with him to-morrow," she said. "I was quite surprised."

"And what did Mr. Ardell say?"

"That Mr. Brook might do what he pleased."

"Well, and I am glad. Of course, one does not think of talking to Mr. Ardell as you would to anyone else, but it just shews Mr. Brook is all right. Next he'll be asking leave to take you away altogether, and then, my dear young lady, your troubles will be over!"

"Or only going to begin in earnest. I can run away from my grandfather, but not from a husband. For you mean Mr. Brook will wish to marry me?"

"Well, yes, Miss Margaret. And why shouldn't he?"

"Or why should he? There is no use conjecturing," said Madge, laughing.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning was dull and misty, with a hint that the sun was laughing somewhere behind the clouds. Before noon rang forth from the various church clocks in the neighbourhood, mist and cloud had cleared away, and a glorious golden autumn day had beamed forth.

Madge had only just completed her toilet, and stood before Mrs. Pinnock a dainty, graceful, but rather un-English little figure when a hansom rattled up to the door, and Brook alighted.

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"Miss Margaret is quite ready, sir," said Mrs. Pinnock; "but she thought you might like to see the master."

"Yes, of course I should. All right, Mrs. Pinnock. I hope you have good news of your son?"

"Very good, indeed, thank you, sir," with a curtsy, and she opened the door of Mr. Ardell's own private apartment.

The old man was busy over a sheet of paper covered with columns of figures and did not seem to like being disturbed, so Brook soon escaped.

Madge awaited him in the hall, and his keen, admiring eyes took in all the details of her pretty dress and attractive *tout ensemble*.

In another moment they were in the hansom and bowling along towards the "Great Northern."

"The gods are propitious!" cried Brook. "We shall have delicious weather, unclouded skies, and a conscience void of offence; for have we not the sanction of your sainted grandpapa? The longer I live the more I see the wisdom of those two emphatic words, beyond which advice cannot go—'Be bold!'"

"But one may be too bold, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course, a man must make up his mind to the risk. And, remember, that in most things human it is double or quits. Also that under the most favourable circumstances we play with a masked antagonist, and can only guess the card she holds. Let us apply my philosophy. To-day is fine and is ours; let us enjoy it. '*Adviennne que pourra*' to-morrow."

"It is my philosophy, too, so far as I have any,"

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said Madge. "Only, unfortunately, it is my tendency to anticipate evil rather than good."

"That is the weaker half of yourself, so you must look out for a daring, hopeful other half to complete your being. I'll have something to say on that subject presently."

Here they drew up at the entrance to the departure side of the station, and Brook went to get the tickets. He was never hurried, yet rarely in all his journeys lost a train or failed to catch a steamer.

"Come along," he said, returning to Madge. "We are in time, but have none to spare."

As they walked along the platform Madge observed a tall, slight, lady-like woman in plain, suitable morning dress, looking at her with fixed attention, and, at a second glance, recognised Mrs. Waring.

Madge immediately bowed and smiled. "How do you do?" she cried. "We are rushing to catch the train," and in another moment found herself in an unoccupied carriage with Brook, who was drawing up one of the windows.

"Who is your friend?" he asked, placing himself opposite her.

"She is Mr. Waring's sister-in-law."

"Ah!"—a long-drawn "ah." "What a story she will tell of your going off with a strange man—God knows where!"

"Perhaps. I do not much mind. Everyone I know is a stranger to her, and she is nothing to me."

"She will tell her brother-in-law."

"Very likely. But do you suppose he would care?"

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Why, he is an artist, and has the artist inclination to lawlessness."

"Indeed! I did not know that lawlessness was an artistic qualification. Do you also possess it?"

"I am not sure, but I suspect I do."

"Well, you are a delightful little outlaw."

The country soon began to look picturesque, and Madge gazed delighted at the many-tinted woods, the increasing stretches of pasture land and undulating country. It seemed a very short distance to Hatfield, where they alighted, and found luncheon awaiting them in the rustic little inn.

Over this refreshment they did not linger long.

"This is not, unfortunately, one of the days on which visitors are admitted to the house. But, after all, a house is a house; and I think you and I will enjoy the endless variety of the park, which will be quite gorgeous on such a day as this. Of course, you'll miss seeing Queen Elizabeth's straw hat."

"I don't care much. I prefer rambling about the park to either hats or houses. I wish I had brought my sketch-book."

"Why didn't you?"

"The time we went to Weybridge you seemed to think I had better not; so——"

"What a thoughtful, *prévoyante* little darling you are, Madge! I may call you Madge? Next time you shall. But 'next time' will bring us into the dreary winter. With the dear grandpapa's approval, we may find other ways of enlivening a holiday."

"Do not laugh at my grandfather. To me he is

a most tragic figure. I could even be fond of him—and I care for so few—oh, so few—only I fear him. Indeed, I am not a coward, but there are times when he hates me, and then I *do* fear him.”

“Do you?” exclaimed Brook, taking her hand and looking into her eyes, his own full of tenderness and passion. “If he produces this effect upon you, might we not manage to seclude him from all chance of doing *you* or anyone mischief?”

“What! Put him in an asylum?” cried Madge, unhesitatingly translating Brook’s suggestion into plain English. “Oh, no; it would hurt him cruelly. He is not bad enough for that! Generally, he is quite quiet, and if no one rubs him the wrong way about his money——”

“Don’t let us speak again about anything unpleasant,” interrupted Brook. “Come. It is a long time since I was here; but I can guide you into the sylvan glades and bosky thickets of this fair domain.”

An English park on a glowing autumnal day! Where can a fairer scene be found? The beech has grown red in the October sunshine, and the birds which feed upon the fallen mast fly up as footsteps draw near and shake from the branches a shower of colour. Trailing sprays of bramble glow with vivid tints. The bent bracken is rich with yellow and brown and mossy green, and the odour of the fragrant woods swept up by the occasional sighing breeze which seems to bid farewell to summer, produces a softening effect, not untinged with a desire for home and shelter.

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"I thought that nothing could surpass the beauty and charm of Fontainebleau in autumn," said Madge, looking round her, after they had reached an abrupt rise of the ground, and sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree, from which they gazed down a sloping glade. "But there is something indescribable here of homelike safety, of kindly guardianship, which makes for peace, though it takes a little from the idea of free wild nature."

"Yes. I feel that, too. England is the most fortunate country in the world, for though we are fenced in on the right hand and on the left, our bonds never gall. Now, in Continental States freedom—to be really free—demands a touch of lawlessness. Come, Madge, I want you to talk to me confidentially. I shall not be in London for some time again. I have some particular private business to transact for the head of our firm in one or two foreign towns, and I want to give an address which will find me, if you have any special need of my help. Moreover, you cannot go on without money, and to ask it from Mr. Ardell is absolutely useless, or worse. It will set him against you, though I confess that, favoured or not, I don't think he will ever give or leave you a penny."

"Nor do I," said Madge, calmly.

"Then," resumed Brook, "I want you to give me a solemn promise that if you ever want money, you will write and ask me for it. To reconcile you to such a proceeding, I will tell you that I consider I owe Mr. Ardell's granddaughter a good deal."

"Why?" she exclaimed, in great surprise. "Surely he never *gave* you any?"

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"No, certainly not! He is quite unconscious of having done me any service, yet he did. He gave me the means of managing a big *coup*, by which he, too, made some money, and certainly lost nothing. Let me, therefore, repay the—let us say loan—to you. Will you make me this promise?"

Madge thought for a moment, and then said, very seriously :

"Yes, I do promise."

"I thank you heartily, my dear little friend. One more favour. Send me a few lines from time to time, just to keep me in touch. Address me there." He handed her a slip of paper with an address in London on it. "Enclose your letter to that address. Post it yourself, and post early in the day."

"I will!" returned Madge, doubling up the slip of paper and placing it in her little old *portemonnaie*. "I should like to have a word from you sometimes," she resumed; "that is, if it does not trouble you too much. If you write, I will burn every scrap as soon as I have read it."

"Why?" he asked, looking at her earnestly. "Why do you make this offer? Do you think I want to keep our correspondence a secret?"

"I do. Why, I cannot tell, but I seem to know it."

"There are reasons which I shall be able to explain before long; but——"

"Ah! You need not trouble about explaining," said Madge, with much equanimity. "I do not want any explanation. Your life, your aims, your ambitions, are all unknown to me. You are a very

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ambitious man, I suspect. I like you the better for so being; and I shall never ask you a question—why should I? You are far too good—too useful a friend to worry or presume upon. And I am not curious.”

“Well, Madge, I am. Tell me, is this friendly artist of yours in love with you?”

“No”—slowly and thoughtfully. “I should say certainly not.”

“Why?”

“Why should he be? Cannot a man be kindly interested in a girl without being in love with her?”

“It generally ends in that.”

“Perhaps; but I know nothing about it.”

“Remember, my sweet friend, Waring could give you a comfortable home. He is a rising man.”

“He may be. But I imagine he has a wife and a daughter, who like fine things more than I do, already.”

“Why, didn’t you tell me he was not married?”

“He is not, but I am almost sure he supports his brother’s wife and daughter.”

“*Tant pis* for you! Still, he might get over that. And I should be an indifferent friend if I did not point out that a tranquil, sheltered life, sufficiently provided with necessities, is a consummation devoutly to be wished for.”

“It is,” she returned, breaking the leaves from a branch she had picked up. “Still, food and lodging and clothes cost dear when marriage is the price. I like change; I do not think I am naturally constant.”

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"This is a terrible look-out!" cried Brook, laughing. "I am quite sure you do yourself injustice. When I come back, you must ask leave to take me to the studio. Then I'll tell you what I think of Waring. I have some insight into character."

"No doubt you have," said Madge.

"I confess I haven't made *you* out yet, you little witch!" She laughed. "But I will," he added, resolutely. "You shall reveal yourself to me."

"The sun is going down," exclaimed Madge.

"It is indeed." And Brook looked at his watch. "Come, we shall have time to walk down that glade and round by some rather curious rocks before the train is due. I could almost wish that this rare, delightful day would run on endlessly."

## CHAPTER XX.

IN spite of all her mental efforts to be sensible and cool-headed, Madge was not proof against the intoxicating effect of her delightful and prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Brook. She was singularly well furnished by nature with self-distrust and judgment; but she was young, and disposed to a certain degree of daring, because she cared very little for the opinion of others. Reserved, and not easily impressed when she did unlock the portals of her heart, she was inclined to open them wide and take in the favoured guest with passionate warmth.

It was strange that Brook should have taken a fancy to so insignificant a creature as herself. But she felt that, at any rate for the moment, he loved her. Eyes and voice and touch told her so; the best of actors could not so imitate nature if the real feeling was not there.

"But he is not going to tell me so yet," she mused. "No doubt there are plenty of obstacles he may never be able to surmount, that he may never *try* to surmount. However, it makes the present very interesting. It makes life a living thing, so I will enjoy it and take all I can get now. There will be time enough to break my heart, or kill myself in some painless, comfortable way later on. I wonder if he will ever write to me? Probably he will not. At all events, now that my grandfather does not want me I need not waste my time. I'll go back to the studio and my black and white."

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Poor Mrs. Pinnock fished in vain for some indication of what had happened during her dear Miss Margaret's "outing." That young lady gave an accurate account of her luncheon, of the park, of the outside of the great house. She also shewed some sprays of briar and branchlets with brilliantly-coloured leaves still clinging to them, and described how she meant to introduce these into some decorative designs she thought of attempting. But a syllable on the subject respecting which Mrs. Pinnock was dying for information she never breathed.

"So you are going back to that weary studio again?" said the housekeeper, meeting Madge on the stairs in her hat and jacket a few days later when October was hardening into November, as that month grew nearer.

"It is not weary, Pinny. It is the only thing that keeps me from weariness. But I wish Mr. Waring would come back. I want his help, for I lost so much time while my grandfather was ill."

"Well, you'll be in in good time for your dinner, Miss Margaret? I've a 'toad in the hole' for you, and I think you'll like it."

"I am sure I shall." And Madge went off.

Yes, it was a relief to find herself among the brushes and paints, and many-coloured palettes again. What a shameful state everything had been left in. She would apply herself to "cleaning up." Her good friend should find his painting things in order, at any rate his brushes clean.

This was sufficient work for one morning, and Madge rejoiced to find that the old interest and

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pleasure in the occupation revived with its practice. She returned in the afternoon to arrange her spoils from Hatfield and sketch out her design.

Next day she was up betimes, eager to resume her work, even though she could not keep her mind quite clear of conjectures as to whether Brook would write to her or not.

Twelve o'clock struck. She paused, and contemplated the result of her labours with some complacency, when there was a sound of voices and ascending footsteps. Then the door was burst open with no gentle hand, and Dick Waring, looking a little dusty as if he had travelled all night, came into the room, slamming the door behind him.

"Well, this is pleasant," he exclaimed, smiling joyously, "to find you ever faithful and at work. I hardly hoped for such a welcome." He shook hands cordially.

"Alas! I have done very little since you went away," said Madge, reciprocating the warmth of his greeting. "I was so long doing sick nurse that I have been obliged to renounce my hopes of surprising you by my diligence."

"That could not be helped. But you are looking remarkably well, all things considered. I suppose Ella has rarely put in an appearance?"

"That I do not know. I have seen her once since she returned. She seems to have enjoyed her holiday greatly."

"I have no doubt she did," drily.

"How long you stayed away," said Madge.

"Yes. I had a very good time in the Western

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Highlands, and was tempted to make an expedition to the Hebrides. Oh, I have lots of sketches to shew you. Couldn't you stay and have lunch with me? I must go and make myself fit to be seen. I started by the last down train from Glasgow last night, and stopped at Peterborough to have a look at the cathedral, which will account for my coming in here at this hour. By Jove! It was nice to find you at work."

"I should like to lunch with you very much, but Mrs. Pinnock expects me to dinner, and would be quite uneasy if I did not return. If it grows a little brighter in the afternoon and you are free I shall come back to see your sketches."

"Oh, I am perfectly free. No one knows I am in town. Now don't let me keep you or you'll lose your dinner. But do come back. I think the day is clearing up and you'll be able to see."

When Madge returned she found a great array of canvases set forth for her inspection, and the remaining hours of daylight were delightfully occupied by what Waring disrespectfully termed "talking shop" and examining the results of his labour. Then he insisted on walking home with her through the fast gathering gloom.

"We must not put off work to the afternoon at this time of the year," said Waring. "Mind you present yourself to-morrow about ten o'clock."

"But you will want the morning hours for your own work?"

"No, not now when you have ceased to be a stranger. I used to be afraid of Ella's chatter, and

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yours, too, I confess, till I knew what an honest worker you are. But it is not easy to concentrate one's mind on a subject when tongues are going hard all round. Do not let your notions of designing slip from you. They may prove money-making."

"And Ella? Will she come early, too?"

"I don't know, and I do not care—if you do not. She is a hopeless idler. She is a mere pleasure lover, and would sell her diminutive soul for fine clothes, and gaiety, and admiration."

"They must all be very nice, and she is very young," said Madge, thoughtfully.

"How much younger than yourself?"

"I don't know. I shall be twenty in December."

"Humph! I know Ella's birthday is in January."

"Then she was born younger than I was and is quite different."

"That's true," emphatically. "Well, here we are," Miss Ardell. "It is a ghastly barrack for a young creature like you to be shut up in," said Waring, as they paused at the door of her unhomelike home.

"I am much happier than I was, though," said Madge, softly, as if to herself.

"Glad to hear it. And why?"

"Chiefly because I have work which I love. Next because I understand my poor grandfather better and do not dislike him now. And then there is a glimmer of hope."

"Three excellent reasons. At ten o'clock to-morrow. So good-bye for the present."

Madge was unusually communicative to her friend and ally, "Pinny," that evening. She described the

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various sketches which pleased her most among Waring's many performances, and repeated the account of his expedition to the wild Western Isles.

Mrs. Pinnock listened with great interest, but she was not entirely satisfied with the result she deduced from her dear Miss Margaret's fluent talk.

"It's that Mr. Waring that interferes with my nice Mr. Brook," she mused as she tied on her night-cap previous to laying her head on the pillow. "Not that Mr. Waring isn't a nice, straightforward gentleman, too. Only them painting ones never have any money. Mr. Waring doesn't seem poor; he has a lot of beautiful things in that studio of his. But then Mr. Brook would never be such a favourite of my poor master's, if he hadn't real, hard ready money down, stowed away in the bank. I wish Miss Margaret would take *him*."

These thoughts occupied the elderly brain of the faithful Pinny; while the youthful one of her much-loved young lady was asking its owner some leading questions.

The best tonic Madge found was work, and she gladly resumed her former life. Ella did not altogether forsake her uncle's studio, but her visits were rare and most irregular; and it was quite impossible to impose silence upon her. Indeed, it seemed to Madge that she was under the influence of some suppressed excitement which tended to increase chatter and giggling. Waring constantly checked her prattle, and told her that unless she intended to work, she had better keep away.

"Well, I will!" she exclaimed, considerably of-

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fended. "I am sure I should get on much better with my French and German if I had lessons at home. Madge has no time to attend me here. And would you mind coming up in the afternoons, when you cannot see to paint, and giving me two or three lessons in the week? Would you, dear?"

"I shall be very pleased to do so," said Madge, thankful to free Waring from the worry of Ella's visit.

"Mother thinks of sending me to Paris after Christmas for a few months," she resumed, with an air of some importance.

"The deuce she does!" cried Waring, a good deal surprised. "Who——" he was going on, when he suddenly closed his lips, and applied himself to his canvas.

Thus Madge's time became more or less filled up, but not very regularly, for Ella was uncertain in her movements, and frequently carried off her instructress to hunt for bargains, which seemed an inexhaustible occupation.

November was now more than half over, and had been less foggy and disagreeable than usual, but, as yet, no word had reached Madge Ardell from Brook. Nor had she written to him.

"I have nothing to write about," she told herself. "I am well and busy. If he writes, I will reply."

As is often the case, the act of thinking about a possible letter appeared to bring it. Two days later, a letter with foreign stamps—Dutch stamps—reached Madge.

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"More than a month since we said good-bye, and no word from you yet! I hope this means that all's well. In any case, send me a few lines. I have nearly finished my business, and hope to return in about a fortnight. I am told my old friend keeps fairly well, though feeble; give me *your* report.

"I am in a curious old-world corner of Holland; shall bring you some photographs. You are often in my thoughts.

"Yours ever,

"C."

Madge's reply was as brief.

"No need to trouble you with a letter, for all is well. I am busy; you must look at my work when you come. Your old friend is better than I ever expected to see him again. At times he speaks of you, and, I think, wishes to see you. He bears with me less reluctantly than he used. Thank you very much for writing.

"Yours,

"M. A."

"I hope the spelling is all right," she mused, as she read it over. "Mr. Brook would be terribly shocked at mistakes of that kind—much more than my dear master. Trifles are of less importance to Mr. Waring."

That Brook should have written first was a great satisfaction to Madge, and she read his few unimportant lines several times; then struck a match and carefully burnt his note in her fireless grate before she left her room, the morning after she had received it.

It so happened that the afternoon turned out dark, damp and drizzling. But Madge had promised Ella to go and match some ribbons at a special shop be-

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fore they were all gone—she herself being engaged to a luncheon party at Mrs. Gifford's—and Madge started, in spite of the weather, to fulfil her promise.

As she turned from Tottenham Court-road into Oxford-street, she recognised in a four-wheeler, whose progress was arrested by a temporary block, her friend, Constance Grey. To put her hand through the open window was her immediate impulse. Yet it was a relief to find it seized and warmly held. For she had begun to fear that Constance had slipped out of her life.

"Madge, dear Madge! Come in. How damp you seem! I am so glad to see you. Make haste; we are moving on."

"I thought I had lost you!" cried Madge. "Why, it is more than three months since I heard anything of you."

"Yes, I know. And I am so afraid you will think my friendship mere lip service, which, indeed, it is not. I have thought of you, Madge, but not as often as I should have done. Only I have been unwell, and a little unhappy, or rather puzzled. Where are you going, Madge? I am quite free, and can take you anywhere you like, as soon as I have seen some new kind of perambulators at a shop near Mudie's. Kitty's was broken on our journey back."

"I have a little shopping to do near the Circus."

"Then can you come home with me?" cried Constance, eagerly.

"I would do so gladly, only I never like to leave Mrs. Pinnock—you remember Mrs. Pinnock?—in ignorance of my whereabouts."

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"Well, it is rather early," returned Mrs. Grey, and paused. "At any rate, come with me to look at the perambulators, and then I will help you to shop. That must do for to-day. But promise to spend to-morrow evening with me? Come about seven. Kitty goes to bed at half-past six, and I generally sit by her till she falls asleep. She begins to notice and talk about everything now, and I so want an unbroken chat with you! If you will stay till ten, I will send you home in a cab."

"That is not at all necessary, Constance. I know my way about now quite well, and can take care of myself."

Very little more was said of a confidential nature. Both friends found great interest in selecting the perambulator, Madge feeling some surprise at the large price Mrs. Grey seemed quite willing to give for the pretty little vehicle. Then they proceeded to match ribbons and lace—an exhausting exercise necessitating the examination of many shops.

Finally Constance set down her friend very near Mrs. Waring's, with a renewed injunction to be faithful to her engagement for the following evening.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THIS very unexpected meeting gave Madge a mixed feeling of pleasure and uneasiness.

To be with Constance had always been a joy to her. Moreover, though her junior, the little taciturn, resolute brunette had always lorded it over her fair, affectionate, stately-looking friend, who, in spite of her imposing aspect, found it a difficult task to say "No."

Poetry and fiction were the favourite reading of Constance, while Madge did not care much for books, and what she did like, were odd, out-of-the-way volumes, which were quite unattractive to the general reader.

Constance was ardently religious, and subject to fits of passionate contrition, for what seemed to her the evil acts and thoughts of her innocent life. Madge's cool, reasoning type of mind delivered her from such imaginative pains.

"If I told lies, or was actively unkind, or did anyone a real wrong, I should know no rest till I undid it. But I don't do such things; I am not inclined. Wait till I am tempted, then you'll see what I'm really made of. There is trouble enough and pain enough provided for us every day without going up in a balloon to bring down more from the skies. You are an angel compared to me. Why do you worry?"

Such conversations often took place between the

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comrades in the rambling school-garden, or on the balcony of the elevated *étage*, which was Madge's home during her German schooldays. How tenderly she now looked back to that period, which then seemed monotonous and tiresome enough to call forth rather unlimited grumbling!

The next day was dry, and a brisk breeze made the streets tolerably passable.

After a morning of diligent and solitary work (for Waring had gone out early), Madge returned to assist Mrs. Pinnock in some household matters, and change her dress.

"Mrs. Grey is always so charmingly dressed," she said, "I must do my best to look nice."

"Oh, of course you must. And you can do it, Miss Margaret," ejaculated the sympathetic Mrs. Pinnock, from the top of a ladder, whereon she stood to hand down the uppermost plates on the kitchen dresser. "I'm sure I'm quite glad you are going to tea with that nice, elegant lady. Maybe, you will meet her husband this evening."

"Maybe," said Madge, doubtfully.

"As to him, I must say I don't like the look of things," resumed Mrs. Pinnock, shaking her head. "I wonder what ails him that he should hide himself the way he does. No good, or I'm much mistaken. There, there, my dear, that's the master's bell. Go and see what he wants."

Madge hastened to ascertain and soon returned.

"He wants me to read the paper to him. I am to bring one candle and sit a little behind him. He likes to listen in the dark."

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"Ah! It's just like him. How is the fire?"

So Madge was set down to read the very driest bits of the paper in her grandfather's estimation, till Mrs. Pinnock arrived at the crucial moment with dinner; and, as Mr. Ardell usually retired after that refreshment, to write in his own room, Madge escaped.

Mrs. Grey had been apparently moving about her pretty, comfortable sitting-room when Madge arrived, for she came across from the bay-window to kiss and greet her.

"It is so nice to see you again," she said, "yet I have been more than a month in London and have never made an attempt to find you. I have been unaccountably lazy and idle."

"Then you stayed away longer than you expected, Con?"

"Yes, a good deal longer. But not in Switzerland. We stayed almost six weeks in Paris. I love Paris. It was the place where I began to be happy, and I think Bertie—I mean Mr. Grey—likes it too. But I do not think I was quite well, or something, for I could not feel bright. I could not enjoy myself all the time I was there."

"How was that?"

"Oh, I cannot tell. I wish I could, then I should cure myself. Here is tea. Do you like muffins, Madge?"

"I do not think I ever tasted muffins."

"Come and taste them now. I think them delicious."

While the servant came to and fro serving the tea,

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Mrs. Grey talked of her little girl; of her physical growth and mental development. Madge listened indulgently, and admired the last photograph taken of the little lady in Paris.

"She is going to be like you, Con."

"Yes, I am afraid so. I should much prefer her being like her father."

"Then he must be very good-looking."

"Not so much good-looking as distinguished-looking. Now, Madge, come and sit here by the fire and tell me all about yourself. What have you been doing since we parted?"

"Very little. My grandfather was seriously ill, and I helped to nurse him. That was my principal event, for I do not think he dislikes me as much as he did."

"I am so glad to hear it. If he begins to like, he will end in loving you dearly. Do you still paint at that man's studio—I forget his name?"

"Mr. Waring? Yes. It is the greatest pleasure I have," returned Madge, not quite truthfully, but the joy of her platonic friendship with Brook was too dear a secret to be lightly touched upon.

"Is he very nice?"

"'Nice' is rather a small word to apply to Mr. Waring," said Madge, laughing. "He is altogether large, tall and broad-shouldered. His voice is deep and strong, but sometimes so kind and full of feeling; and he has a large way of looking at things, though he is so simple—a regular Englishman. He never splits straws. I really have nothing to tell, except that I am less miserable than I used to be."

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There was a pause. Mrs. Grey gazed at the fire with eyes that evidently saw much further away.

"Now tell me, Con," resumed Madge, "what has gone wrong with you? You do not look well, you are pale. Those big eyes of yours have a strained look as if you thought of distressful things."

"I believe I am physically in excellent health, but ——" She paused. Her face cleared a little. Then she smiled and said: "I am inclined to chase away my bogies by describing them to you. You are such a safe little creature. And really I have no reason to find fault with anyone. You will keep all I am going to say absolutely to yourself?"

"I will," said Madge.

"Oh, what a relief it will be to open my heart! Yet I know I ought not. Well, Madge, I believe my complaint—and it is a very cruel one—is jealousy!"

"Yes, it must be very bad. Of whom are you jealous?"

"I don't know. Of the whole world."

"Oh, there must be safety in such a multitude."

"Ah, Madge, it is too, too true an instinct. My husband does not love me as he used. He is as kind, as generous at times, as agreeable as ever, as careful of my comfort, as sympathetic as ever. But, oh! how can I define the change that has come over him! The little cloud like a man's hand, only smaller, much smaller, that hides his heart from me. You see, dear, we are so often separated. I know he cannot help it—that he is quietly building up a fine position. But how do I know what numbers of charming women he may meet, and men are not

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naturally faithful. Then I am growing dull in this constant seclusion. He comes to meet me with the same caresses, the same expressions of joy; but the life, the reality, has gone out of them. They are the merest *rechauffé*. Then he never cared for my sweet little Kitty half enough, now he is quite indifferent. He is dreadfully afraid of hurting me; I can see it. And, oh, it cuts me to the soul to see how perpetually he is on guard. What shall I do, Madge? What shall I do?"

Madge was silent for a second or two.

"What do I know that I should speak?" she said at last. "And you have really told me nothing tangible. These may all be mere imaginings. Were you much alone in the Alps?"

"No, Bertie was a good deal with us there. And it is not when I am alone these thoughts torment me, but when my husband is with me."

"From all I have read and heard," said Madge, thoughtfully, "if your husband is a little tired of you, nothing you do is of the slightest use. So I do not know what to suggest. I never had a lover. I am afraid I should be horribly jealous if I had. Yet I think I understand being inconstant, too. Could you forgive Mr. Grey if he forgot you for a little while?"

"And came back to me?" interrupted Constance, eagerly. "Yes, I could. I have no spirit, as it is called. I want his whole heart; I cannot live without it. He is my life, and he has been so good, he is so good. Oh, Madge, do not laugh at my folly and weakness!"

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"You will laugh at your own dreams, perhaps, when Mr. Grey next comes back. You ought not to torment yourself in this way. You have simply fallen a victim to your own imagination. You ought to trust him more, and you have no reason to doubt him."

Mrs. Grey coloured at the implied rebuke.

"I suppose I am an unreasonable goose," she exclaimed. "But it has done me good to air my imaginary wrongs. Yet I wish I had not. I feel I have been disloyal. You will forget all I have said, will you not, Madge?"

"Yes, everything."

Then Mrs. Grey told her friend of a delightful project her husband had evolved. It was to settle themselves in Paris for the winter. He could be much more with them, he said, as business would call him more frequently to that queen of cities than hitherto.

"I do not think we shall be long in London, so try and spend an evening with me next week. I will write and fix one. If I could only see you, Madge, whenever I like, it would be so reviving. And if I might ask you to stay with us in Paris!"

Then they discussed whereabouts Mrs. Grey should select an *appartement* in Paris, and the evening was over before they had said half that crowded their busy brains.

Mrs. Grey insisted that Madge should return in a cab. The roads just near Ivy Lodge were so lonely, she said, and, in spite of her young friend's objections and assurances that she was well ac-

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customed to take care of herself, sent the house servant to fetch one. And so they parted with promises to meet again soon.

"She will make herself unhappy, in spite of all I can say," thought Madge, as she drove homewards. "How extraordinary it is that such a fancy should take hold of her! Can the possibility of such a sorrow cast its shadow before? Her power of anticipating good will intensify evil when it comes. Still, she enjoys more than I can."

Madge Ardell hardly knew whether to be pleased or displeased at the change which, about this time, began to steal over her grandfather. Instead of his old aversion to her presence, he gradually grew into the habit of asking for her as the light grew dim in the short winter days, and telling her to read certain portions of the newspaper, which he had not been able to master in the morning. And, though she was glad he seemed so far reconciled to her presence, she felt it rather irksome to be tied to the house from an early hour of the afternoon.

His hours, too, were also changing. He did not want his breakfast till an hour or more later than when first Madge came. Mrs. Pinnock believed that the old man lay long awake after his brief first sleep, and that towards morning sheer weariness induced heavy slumber, from which he did not rouse himself till late.

Indeed, Madge fancied she heard him creeping about the house in the dead of the night, a sound which seemed to her exceedingly gruesome, and made her very careful about locking her door.

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Sometimes the old man accepted her services without a word of thanks or notice. Sometimes he talked to her as if thinking aloud, and occasionally—but rarely—asked her to look at him, and let him see if it was the yellow fiend or the one he loved best that looked out of her eyes. She generally replied, when he waited for an answer, that she would gladly be of use to him, and comfort him, if he would let her.

Mrs. Pinnock, who generally went to bed tired and slept profoundly, would not listen to Madge's idea that the old man rambled about the house at night.

"He hasn't the strength for it, Miss Margaret," she said. "Why, it's years since he was upstairs. He'll never go up again, mark my words. You see how seldom he goes out of the house; and I don't think he ever tries to go and hear cases in court as he used. I'm sure I wish Mr. Brook would come back, or call. I feel uneasy about the poor, dear old gentleman."

"I really think you are fond of him, Pinny."

"Well, indeed I am. He has been good in a way to me, and trustful, which draws one to a fellow-creature."

"I suppose so. But when I came first he was curiously inhuman. I hated him—now I do not. I feel so sure he is not responsible, I have only pity and some fear for him."

"Well, Miss Margaret, I am pretty sure he is sensible enough to buy and sell most people. Are you going out, miss?"

"Yes. Mr. Waring has a sort of party this after-

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noon. Some friends of a gentleman whose portrait he painted in the summer are coming to see the painting; and I am to help Miss Waring to make tea. I wish I had a nice new winter cloak. Mine is so shabby; but at least I can throw it off."

"Well, I wish you had, dear. You do want it. You'll not be back, maybe, till six?"

"I am afraid not. I tried to tell Mr. Ardell I was going to stay on at the studio, but I don't think he listened to me."

It was, in fact, a great day at the studio. Not that Waring was much affected by its greatness. He had put the final touches to Mr. Martin's picture, and now only cared to have it sent away safely to the owner. To him it was only a superior sort of pot-boiler, though it was an admirable portrait.

Mrs. Waring and Ella were in their very best clothes and a state of repressed excitement; and Madge found her time fully taken up in preparing the tea-table, and setting forth the enormous variety of cakes, recklessly ordered by Dick—a duty entirely left to her by Ella.

Soon a number of gorgeous dames began to arrive, accompanied by a sparse sprinkling of men, and only Waring himself found time to thank Madge for the trouble she had taken.

"By Jove, Miss Ardell, you are a dainty-handed Phyllis! You have arranged a most tasteful spread. I feel inclined to attack the cakes at once." Then, walking into the middle of the gay group, which gathered round the portrait, he called Ella.

"You've forgotten your duties. Go and help Miss

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Ardell to pour out tea!" A mandate which seemed to displease Mrs. Waring, for she said, in a sarcastic tone:

"How could you neglect such duties, Ella?"

And Ella hastened to offer her assistance.

Mrs. Waring's eyes constantly sought the door, and an ill-concealed air of expectation marred the tone of calm, superior refinement she adopted.

"Shall we have the pleasure of comparing the portrait and the original?" asked a lady in crimson brocade and sables, to whom Waring was handing a cup of tea.

"Oh, Mr. Martin said he would come if he could, but he is so tremendously busy always."

"I thought even the busiest man of business could steal a Saturday afternoon from 'Mammon'!"

"Yes, if he likes. But Martin has been sufficiently bored by his portrait already. Why, here he is! Ha, Martin! Very glad to see you. Everyone wants to compare notes, and decide how far I have caricatured you."

"You feel safe enough, I suspect. Good-morning, Mrs. Waring," approaching the hostess with some *empressement*.

The chatter now began again with redoubled vigour. Everyone had an opinion to give as to the degree of likeness, but the average was highly favourable. Fresh inquiries for tea and cake on the part of the ladies, and for whiskies and sodas by the men, ensued, and the company began to disperse.

"It is certainly a most excellent likeness, and not in the least flattering—quite the contrary, in fact," Mrs. Waring summed up, taking a last fond look at

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the portrait, as she rearranged her bonnet-strings, and beckoned Ella to pin her "fall."

"You ought to have brought that good-looking friend of yours, Miss Ardell, the gentleman I met you with at the Great Northern last autumn."

"He is not in town," returned Madge, calmly. "Indeed, he asked me if he may come and see Mr. Waring's studio."

"Who is this?" asked Waring, sharply.

"A Mr. Brook—a friend of my grandfather's."

"Is he Brook who is a partner in Joyce and Granton's?" asked Mr. Martin. "I have done business with him sometimes. He is the real manager of the firm. Clever fellow, and keen as a needle!"

"I really know nothing about him, except that he comes to see my grandfather, who seems to like him better than anyone else."

"Pray, is Mr. Ardell, of Osborne-place, your grandfather?" Mr. Martin asked, with some interest.

"He is," returned Madge, much surprised.

"I haven't seen the old gentleman for a long time; in fact, I did not know he was still alive. Mrs. Waring, let me give you and your daughter a lift home; my brougham is here, and it's roomy enough."

"Thank you very much. If it is not taking you out of your way, I should be very glad."

"Certainly—by all means. Come along. Good-day, Waring. Ever so much obliged to you for immortalising me. Capital portrait, by Jove! I feel it's like. Good-morning, Miss Ardell."

Mrs. Waring and her daughter made their *adieux*

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hastily, and departed, leaving Waring and his favourite pupil together.

"That was a sudden exit!" cried Waring, looking after his sister-in-law.

"As they have gone," said Madge, "I can put away your cakes and things. Why, there are two or three still uncut!"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about them. The people below have a lot of children, and they will polish off any amount of scraps. It is growing dusk and chilly; let us make up a big fire and have a chat over it." He began to add both coal and wood.

"Here—here is a diminutive armchair, just suited to a sprite like yourself."

"Thank you. This is delightful!" said Madge, nestling into it.

"I certainly think so. This is the hour to be confidential; but, for a young lady of nineteen, you know remarkably well how to keep your lips closed."

"I am very nearly twenty! Then there is very little in my life that is worth talking about—or even thinking about."

"Heavens! You must be a very exceptional girl if you do not picture your future."

"I may build castles in the air, like other girls, but I never fail to see through these airy edifices the stern stones, the bolts and bars, the dark dungeons, and secret stairs of the real castle."

"My dear child, I don't like to hear you talk in this way. Never mind probabilities so long as you

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can cling to a sunny outlook. Trying to nail yourself to realities, you only cheat yourself of your youth, and do not help your maturity forward an inch."

"Never mind. You and I have a joy that everyone has not—though mine is a very humble share. We can steal bits of nature and hang them in our rooms; and faces, too—faces we love." She stopped, as if feeling she was speaking too much.

"You are an uncommon sort of girl, and I do not think I quite understand you. But we were going to be confidential, eh?"

"Were we?"

"Yes. At least, I want to ask you some questions, if you will promise not to paralyse me by your offended dignity."

Madge laughed. Her laugh was very pleasant, arch and sweet, and the teeth it revealed white and pearly.

"Ask what you like. I shall not be offended."

"Well, then," began Waring, and paused to break an obdurate lump of coal. He resumed, in a quick tone: "Who is this Brook? I never heard of him before."

"Yes, I am sure you did. I told you of his having brought Mr. Marks, the picture dealer, to look at my early attempts."

"Oh, was that the man? Yes, I remember. Has old Marks made any more liberal purchases from you?"

"No, but Mr. Brook recommended me to offer some of my old things to a man in Tottenham Court-

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road, so I did; things I had done in Paris. He bought three pictures, two quite little."

"Oh! Have I ever seen them?"

"No. Of course, I would not touch anything I have done in *your* studio under your direction. They are as much yours as mine."

"No, I do not agree with you. I should be very pleased if you could make a little money by your work. For I fear grandpapa does not give you a very liberal dress allowance."

Madge laughed. "A man of his years and ways can hardly take in feminine necessities in the way of clothes."

"So Brook was the man who introduced you to old Marks. Is he a City man?"

"I think so. He never talks to my grandfather about anything except money—investments—shares—things like that. I fancy Mr. Brook is rather eager to be rich, too."

"Is he young?"

"About your own age, I imagine," looking keenly at him; "though in some ways he seems older."

"Money-grubbing ages a man."

"I should not call him a money-grubber," said Madge, clasping her long, slender fingers round her knee, reflectively. "He is fond of pleasure, and is awfully sorry for me because I never have any. That is the reason he took me to spend the day at Hatfield, when I met Mrs. Waring. And it *was* very delightful."

"Oh, indeed! I daresay it was," said Dick Waring, not in a very amicable tone. "Mr. Ardell must

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know this man very well to trust you with him for these long expeditions."

"Oh, of that he never thinks. Mr. Brook brings him lots of information about money, that means all possible excellence to the old man. How astonished French people would be, wouldn't they?" asked Madge, with an amused smile.

"They make too much fuss, but perhaps err on the right side," said Waring, gruffly.

"Even in France," urged Madge, "they do not mind artist women not being exactly 'on the line.'"

"Do you wish for this sort of liberty?" asked Waring, somewhat sternly.

"I don't wish about it," she returned, dreamily; "I take it. There can be no real wrong in making an expedition with a pleasant companion—man or woman."

A short silence ensued. Then Waring asked, carelessly:

"Is this Brook married?"

"I do not know in the least. He doesn't look married."

Waring laughed. "How does the outward and visible man shew whether he is married or not?"

"An unmarried man is brisker and smarter and better dressed; carries himself with an air, and looks as if he didn't dine with the same person every day."

"Why, I had no idea you were such an accomplished worldling, Miss Ardell. Then you do not approve of matrimony?"

"In the present state of society it isn't bad for the

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generality of women," she replied, as if thinking aloud; "but if I were a man, I should never marry."

"As it is, you have not registered a vow against that holy state?"

"No, nor against anything else. One can never tell what you may be forced to do."

"You are a wise little woman! So you do not know if your friend Brook is married or not. Does Mr. Ardell?"

"I cannot tell. If he ever knew, he probably forgets."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Waring, starting up, and making one or two turns up and down the room. "How absolutely unprotected you are!"

"I do not see that it matters much."

"I should like to meet this Mr. Brook," said Waring, not heeding her.

"That can be easily managed. He asked me one day if he might come and see your studio, and what I have been doing."

"Oh, he did? Well, pray tell him I shall be delighted to see him. He is still away, I understand?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I have no idea. He comes and goes in the most unexpected way."

"Then he does not keep you informed of his movements? He does not write to you?"

"He has written to me once to ask how my grandfather and everything was going on, and I replied."

Here Waring, looking up suddenly, caught Madge's eyes fixed upon him with an expression of

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drollery and amusement that brought the colour to his brown cheek.

"You disrespectful little puss! I believe you are bamboozling and laughing at your grave and reverend master."

"Not bamboozling!"—laughing a little bit. "What is it you distrust or dislike in Mr. Brook?"

"He is young," said Dick, throwing himself into his chair again, "good-looking, agreeable, daring, dangerous, and he doesn't bring his wife to see you!"

Madge laughed heartily.

"Poor man! Must he marry a wife that he may call upon me? You must wait till you see him before forming an opinion. And now, Mr. Waring, I must go back."

"One moment, Miss Ardell. Pray come early to-morrow. I think I have found a bit of paying work for you—if you will undertake it. I will explain everything to-morrow."

"What a nice fire to leave!" said Madge.

"I wish to Heaven you could stay!" exclaimed Dick. "Put on your wraps, and I will walk home with you."

"I suppose there is no just cause or impediment why you should not," she returned, with a laughing, half-defiant glance.

"I see you think I am a prig, because——"

"I think you are one of the best and most generous of friends," interrupted Madge.

"Good! With that flattering sentence this discussion shall end."

And they set forth most amicably.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"COME as early as you can to-morrow," were Waring's last words before leaving Madge at her grandfather's door, and they sent her home in what would have been radiant spirits, with a more hopeful disposition. Indeed, Madge felt unusually cheerful, and even disposed to "dream bright dreams"—a mood encouraged by finding a little note from Mrs. Grey awaiting her.

It was to beg that she would come to tea on the following Tuesday.

"It may possibly be the last time I can see you before leaving London, as Mr. Grey seems anxious to settle in Paris, and there is a good deal to be done before we can leave. I earnestly hope we may meet in Paris where, I think, things promise to be brighter. Send me a card, dear, 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"Your grandpapa has been asking for you, Miss Margaret," said Mrs. Pinnock, as Madge folded up the note and put it in her pocket. "He is sitting writing in his bedroom, and is not one bit sleepy. He has been abusing me uphill and down dale for bringing up another scuttle full of coals. What we are to do with him when the weather gets colder, I am sure I don't know. You have had tea, I suppose, miss? Well, then, just take off your hat and go in to him."

Madge did so, and found Mr. Ardell in his old grey winter dressing-gown sitting in front of his

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bureau, on which a reading-lamp that Brook had given him some years before stood."

"Where—where have you been? I want you to read a paragraph I can't quite make out in the evening paper. It is disgracefully printed. All the papers are now. Where have you been?"

"At the studio."

"Are you making any money?" in a hoarse, eager whisper. "If you have——" He paused.

"Yes, I know," Madge put in, "some of it ought to be yours. But I am not earning anything just now. I hope to do so soon."

"Hope—hope—aye, how long I hoped! At last the yellow fiend gave me what I wanted, and managed to cheat me all the same; and now he is at his old tricks again making a scourge of you. Maybe you don't know—maybe—— Do get the paper, there is something I want. There it is in my big chair. You shall sit here and read by the lamp. But stay. I will lock the bureau first. Remember you are never to lay a finger on it or on anything in it."

"I assure you I should never think of taking so great a liberty."

"Very well, very well; bring me the paper. There, on the third page, I think, where they have bits of City news."

He ran his finger along the column, holding the paper close to the lamp, and then, digging the point of his claw-like nail into it, held it out to Madge.

The paragraph was headed: "Sudden death of a City Magnate." "We regret extremely to announce

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the death of Mr. Joshua Granton, of the well-known firm of Joyce and Granton, Broad-street. He was thrown from his horse yesterday afternoon as he was about to enter the Park at Hyde Park Corner. His head unfortunately came into violent contact with the curb-stone, fracturing his skull. He was carried into St. George's Hospital, and never recovered consciousness, and expired at two o'clock this morning. The deceased gentleman, who left no family, was highly esteemed by all who knew him, and——"

"Ah, that will make a change for Brook," interrupted Mr. Ardell, "a very great change. Old Joyce has been growing rather feeble and unfit for business, and his son, who is next in the firm, sees with Brook's eyes and hears with Brook's ears, they say. We'll have him here again pretty soon, though he scarcely can have time to call. Indeed, I do not want to see him. I have nearly finished the work I wanted to do, so I do not need him."

"He was useful to you once, was he not?" asked Madge, in a slightly reproachful tone.

"Yes, yes, so was I to him. A clever fellow, keen, bold, cautious, not to be daunted. Ah!" His sentence ended in an admiring sigh. "But they will not put his name in the firm unless he can lay down a pretty big sum, a very considerable sum. Suppose this shock kills old Joyce. Everything would be in the hands of Brook—everything."

Mr. Ardell mused over this for a few minutes, shaking his head at intervals and murmuring "Everything." Then rousing himself, he sat up in

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his chair and said, abruptly: "Go, fetch me this morning's paper. Look in the Law Reports, the will case, Levitt versus Levitt and Badger. You began it and then went away. You mustn't do that again. I only got to——"

"I thought you had gone to sleep for your afternoon doze," said Madge, apologetically.

"Make surer another time."

She went in silence, and bringing the paper read what were to her the dreary details of a disputed will case.

Mr. Ardell threw in many shrewd remarks shewing his interest in the case. Then he suddenly exclaimed:

"That will do! I must write a few lines before I sleep. Tell Mrs. Pinnock she must go and post a letter for me. Tell her to come here."

"Shall I return?" asked Madge.

"No, no, go to bed. I hope you don't sit wasting candles and reading silly books?"

"No, I do not, indeed. Good-night."

Mr. Ardell did not notice this civility.

"I declare he is growing quite accustomed to you," said Mrs. Pinnock, with great satisfaction. "I was just getting him a drop of arrowroot and port wine. He hardly took a bite at his dinner. You see he knows there's a goodish few bottles of wine in the cellar that never cost him anything."

"Who gave them to him?" asked Madge.

"They were there when Mr. Ardell came into possession. It was years and years before he would touch a drop of anything stronger than water, but

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once he fainted, and then I wanted to go and buy him some wine. He gave me a rusty key and told me to look in the cellar. It's my belief he doesn't know the half he has. I do wish he would give you some money, my dear. Your boots *must* be new soled, cost what they may."

Madge laughed, and said she would wait another week.

Then she went away to her room to finish some needlework before she slept, and dream heavenly waking dreams of soon seeing Brook, and reading in his eyes how it charmed him to look upon her; to feel in the inmost core of her heart that she exercised a most unaccountable fascination upon him.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

To Madge's great satisfaction the "bit of work" Waring had to propose was to illustrate a child's book to be published by a well-known firm. The subjects were simple; and, after looking through the story and discussing the treatment with her master and good friend, Madge found courage to undertake the task, and began it eagerly at once. This, and her evening with Mrs. Grey, helped the time to pass more swiftly than Madge had hoped.

Constance was less confidential and more cheerful than on the former occasion. She seemed very pleased to go to Paris, and very busy preparing for the move, as Mr. Grey was to come next week to escort her and little Kitty to their new abode. He had found a delightful "*appartement*" at Passy, with a large garden attached, where Kitty might play about in fine weather; and of all her husband's ar-

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rangements Constance spoke contentedly and hopefully.

But Madge observed that the pained, faraway look had not left her eyes. Nor was her speech as spontaneous and unguarded as when they last met.

"I will write to you," said Mrs. Grey, when they were parting, "and you must answer. Do not let me lose sight of you again. But never write to me except between certain dates, which I will give you. God bless you, dear! I so long for the day when I can introduce my husband to you. I am sure you will like him. And do not fancy dreadful things because he is obliged to keep his private life dark just at present."

"I do hope you will be well and happy, Constance. Be sure you write to me."

It is to the credit of our little heroine that, in spite of the dazzling prospect of meeting Brook before long, she kept her thoughts steadily on her work. The tinge of joy imparted to her fancy by her anticipations lent something of pretty playfulness to her designs, which drew sincere praise from Waring, who was very little in his studio during the week after Madge had begun her task.

Ella flew in and out and disturbed her a good deal, but she made no pretence of doing anything. She seemed in high spirits and rather excited, while her thoughts appeared chiefly occupied with clothes.

"I am obliged to get some new things, you know," she said, "for I am going to spend Christmas with Mrs. Gifford, and she will probably give some dinner parties."

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"Won't your mother be very lonely?" asked Madge.

"Oh, no, not at all," cried Ella, with a laugh, as if Madge had said something ridiculous, and then continued: "I believe I am to go to school in Paris for some months, so I needn't worry about lessons here. I must collect some exercise books I left here last summer when we began. What a quiet little prig I thought you at first, Madge, but you were a trump to me afterwards. I wonder now if you would be so nice and kind as to design an evening dress for me. You have so much taste. Why do you work away so hard here? You would get ever so much more for designing fashions."

"I prefer this. But I will try to do something for you; only I must see some fashions, for I do not know what is worn now."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times! I am sure you must be sick of being here all day. And Uncle Dick is not exhilarating. He is so solid and serious, makes an old man of himself. Never mind, you shall come to us often when——" She stopped abruptly and coloured.

"I shall have to stay at home more, I expect, as my grandfather often wants me to read to him in these long dark evenings."

"Does he?" with great interest. "Then he is coming round to you. Perhaps, after all, he will leave you his money, and what an heiress you will be!"

"Oh, I am sure he will not. How did you know he is rich?"

"People say so. Mr. Martin says he is reported

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to have lots of money. However, one never knows what to believe. Tell Uncle Dick that I came for my books and belongings. Won't Mr. Ardell think it rather odd your coming here every morning by yourself?"

"No. Why should he? Do you?"

"Oh, I'm not at all straitlaced, but mother is, you know. Of course, it is all nonsense. Good-bye, dear. You will not forget the design? And you need not go in for too strict economy. I'll tell mother you'll come to tea when you have finished it." She blew a kiss to her useful friend and departed.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

MADGE had no opportunity of giving Dick his niece's message, for he did not return till after she had left the studio. Indeed, Madge supposed he had some important business, as she did not see much of him just then.

Was it seven days, or weeks, or months, that Madge's state of restless expectancy, and almost "fearful" looking forward to a great joy or a terrible sorrow, lasted?

It was really little more than a week after she had promised to design a dress for Ella when a letter at last reached her. As usual, it bore no address, but was dated two days back. It was very brief.

"I shall be in London on Thursday, and will call on Mr. A. late in the afternoon. You will try to be at home?"

"Yours ever,

"C."

Madge scarcely knew how to live through the intervening forty-eight hours. Yet she mastered herself sufficiently to work hard and finish the amount of illustrations to which she was limited. Then, with a sense of thankfulness that she was comparatively free, she left them in the studio, with a little note, asking Waring to look over them if he had time, and she would come next morning to hear his verdict.

Evening had closed in, and Mr. Ardell, having finished his meal, had had the greater part of the newspaper read aloud to him. The lamp and a good

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fire made his ordinarily cheerless bedroom look almost comfortable when, about seven o'clock, a ring at the house-bell set Madge's heart beating so loud and strong that she could hardly see or hear.

"It's Mr. Brook, sir," said Mrs. Pinnock, entering almost the next moment. "He asks if it is too late to come in."

"No, no, by no means!" cried Mr. Ardell, who had grown drowsy, waking up. "Tell him to come in."

Madge instinctively drew back into the shadow at the further side of the fire, and hesitated whether to stay or go, as she so often did when Brook came to see Mr. Ardell.

The old man rose to receive his visitor. "You've been away a long time. Began to think I should never see you again!" he said, with the nearest approach to cordiality he ever shewed.

"Glad to see you looking so much better!" cried Brook, cheerily. "I hardly hoped to see such an improvement. And how is——"

He stopped and looked round. Perceiving Madge, he turned quickly, and took her hand, and his back being towards Mr. Ardell, he made no attempt to hide the joy, the sudden radiance, that lit up his eyes and played round his lips, as he pressed her hand softly and warmly.

"I did not see you at first. Much travelling has made me dull."

"Sit down, sit down," said Mr. Ardell, impatiently. "I never see anyone, or hear anything when you are away. And though I *am* on my last legs, I like to know what is going on in the City.

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You have lost your partner, I see. How does that affect you? You may go, child"—to Madge. "I don't want you—nor does Mr. Brook. Go, go, go!"

"One moment," cried Brook, laughing. "Tell me, Miss Ardell, have you had a holiday since we went to Hatfield?"

"No, none whatever."

"Well, then, Mr. Ardell must let you come and see a charming fairy piece they have at the Gaiety. It is the last night but three or four, and I do not know when I can do anything so frivolous again. If we can get there by 8.15, it will do. And I can give you the intermediate time and lots of gossip, my dear sir."

"Yes, yes. Go if you like. But I have no change about me, mind. You mustn't go out at the time I want you to read to me, for a month—two months! Sit down, Brook, sit down."

"Mrs. Pinnock will let you know when I am free," said Brook, lowering his voice, to Madge.

She gave him an answering smile and a delightful blush as she turned to leave the room.

It was nearly an hour (what a portentously long hour!) before Mrs. Pinnock came to summon her dear "Miss Margaret," and her kind, strong face lit up with pleasure at the notion of a treat for her young lady.

"I'm sure Mr. Brook is a nice gentleman, if ever there was one! He's that kind and pleasant. Mr. Ardell is regular tired out with all the talk and the news: he is going to bed directly. Mr. Brook says the theatre will be over early, as it's a sort of

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children's play, and you'll be home by 9.30. So I'll just sit down and darn the master's socks a bit, till you come in. Indeed, you've made yourself look downright pretty!"

Madge smiled, and ran downstairs. Brook was waiting at the open door, through which she saw a hansom waiting. They descended the steps in silence, and, having helped his companion into the vehicle, he took her hand in both his own, exclaiming:

"At last! We are not going to the theatre, you know. Do you mind?" said Brook, after a short pause, as they drove towards the Strand. "I have so much to say that I cannot go and listen to other people's talk; but I hope you will not be bored by a quiet dinner with me."

"I think I can excuse the theatre to-night," said Madge, gravely.

"And *you* will have something to tell me, I suppose?"

"Little or nothing," she returned. "My life has been extremely monotonous. My chief event happened little more than a fortnight ago. Mr. Waring——" The horse shying at something startled her, and Brook filled up her sudden pause by adding:

"Has declared his love for you?"

"No, indeed. He has done better. He has found me some delightful work—to illustrate a child's book. Work that is well paid, too."

"Is that better than offering himself?"

"Yes, it is. My work is more my own than Mr. Waring or any other man ever would be."

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"What a shrewd little sceptic you are!" exclaimed Brook.

Here they stopped at the door of an Italian restaurant, supposed to be of high excellence. The large hall on the entrance floor was quite full, but, at a word from Brook, a waiter conducted them upstairs to a small but prettily decorated private room, where the table was laid for two.

"Here," said Brook, "we can speak freely. Take off your hat, my little friend, and let me fancy myself at home with you."

Madge immediately complied, and laid it on a console table at the back, without glancing at the glass.

"It is charming to see a girl not troubling about her looks," observed Brook, admiringly.

"If you mean that I do not trouble about my looks, you are quite mistaken," she replied. "I think a great deal about them. I put on that hat with the greatest care in order to be able to take it off easily and safely."

"Pray leave me some illusions, you uncompromising philosopher!"

The entrance of the waiter with dinner interrupted them, and during the elegant little repast, which they proceeded to discuss, Brook talked lightly and pleasantly of his travels among the dead cities of the Zuyder Zee; whether lately or during some former visit to Holland, Madge did not exactly find out.

They did not linger long over their evening meal, and as soon as they had taken the post-prandial coffee, Brook drew forward a low couch to the fire-

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place, where some logs of wood blazed and crackled, and begged Madge to let him make her comfortable, which he did by placing cushions behind her.

"I don't believe you have an easy chair or an available cushion in all the funereal chambers of your grandfather's melancholy abode," he said. "I do not know how you exist; and women are credited with finding a certain degree of ease and luxury indispensable. Tell me, did you think I had stayed away an unconscionable time?"

"No, the time had nothing to do with your conscience," said Madge, a soft colour rising in her usually colourless cheeks, and a smile dimpling round her mouth. "But I am very glad you have come back."

"Thank you for such a gracious speech. But, having constituted myself your guardian, in a sense, it is my duty to see as much as I can of you. Now, for a while, this will be rather difficult. You know—or at least I believe you know—that I am junior partner in an important firm—a sort of fly on the wheel. The man who was senior to me died the other day."

"Yes, I know," said Madge.

"Do you?"—in a surprised tone. "Have you taken to reading the newspapers?"

"I read them to my grandfather, and he had a great deal to say about it. He says the yellow fiend is on your side, and that everything you touch will succeed."

"I hope so," said Brook, drinking a glass of wine, and then rising to pace the room slowly. "This

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man's death is a great chance for me. He leaves no son, but some of his capital goes to his widow, who is also to be paid a heavy percentage on what remains in the business. If I can introduce a certain amount of money to fill up the vacuum, my name will be added to that of the firm. This will be the first really upward step of my life; but all this must be Greek to you. However, you can understand that these changes imply a great amount of work—an absolute absence of leisure for some little time to come."

"Of course, I can see that."

"Then if I seem negligent in any way, Madge, you will know that I am not to blame. I am a slave to the exigencies of my situation. You will trust me, you will write to me unhesitatingly if you want help of any kind? For a woman you are marvelously abstemious in the matter of writing letters."

"Have you corresponded with a great many?" asked Madge, quietly.

"Not a *great* many," said Brook, laughing. "Some are charming correspondents, some are bores. But I have had no time for some years to indulge in such delectable avocations."

"I have a great dread of being tiresome to anyone. It is such a mistake, such a confession of weakness, to crave for 'answers,' 'a place in the memory dearest,' and all that sort of thing. No one ever does anything for a bore."

"I rather think, my sweetest little Madge, that you were a mature woman of the world in long clothes!" exclaimed Brook, much amused. "You

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are like these extraordinary French girls who step from the snow-white innocence and world ignorance of the conventual parlour to the full-blown tact and comprehension of the Parisian *salon*."

"I don't think I ever was very young," said Madge, reflectively.

"Perhaps so," he returned, gravely. "But you are developing some germs of youth. What did you do all the long weeks I was away? For I flatter myself you have no confidential friend save myself."

"I have not, indeed," said Madge, almost in a whisper, the tears standing in her big brown eyes. "I often wonder why you are so good to me."

"I will explain all that to you some day," murmured Brook, his eyes dwelling on her with a lingering, loving look, that sent a wild thrill of delight vibrating through her veins, and made her avert her eyes in instinctive self-defence. "Did you manage any dealings with my old Jew in Tottenham Court-road?"

"Yes. He bought altogether five sketches from me."

"At how much apiece?"

"I forget exactly, but he gave me thirty-five shillings, and I was delighted."

Brook did not reply.

"I thought of you often," he resumed, after a brief pause. "In my thinking I found a little gift that will, I hope, please you."

He drew a small parcel from his pocket and came to sit beside her. Opening his packet, he produced

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a little case from which he took a curious, old-fashioned ring set with a variety of coloured stones in a quaint and graceful design.

"It took my fancy in a Parisian curiosity shop. Let me put it on for you."

He took her left hand and slipped it on the third finger.

"What long, slender fingers!" he said. "A real artist's hand—so long and flexible. Wear it for my sake, Madge."

"I will wear it always with pleasure. What a charming ring, quite unlike anything I have ever seen."

"You have made me a large promise—to wear it always." He still held her hand, and, lifting it, kissed the long, tapering fingers gently. "Are you a true-hearted, constant little girl?"

"I cannot tell," said Madge, drawing her hand softly away, and gazing admiringly at her ring. "I do not care for many, and I can fancy being inconstant. Of course, if a strong man keepeth the house, all's well; but if a stronger than he——"

"Ah! That is indeed a confession," interrupted Brook. "If you are right about yourself, why, no man ought to trust you, and who can love where he cannot trust?"

"Perhaps not. But men and women, as far as I can gather, don't fall in love with the best and most trustworthy people they know, but with those that take their fancy, however worthless they may be."

"Go on, you little witch! I like to hear your original philosophy. It must be original, for you cannot have collected it from experience."

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"I suppose not. I scarcely know where I found my notions. They just come to me."

"At any rate, promise me to keep that ring before your eyes to remind you of one friend who will be both constant and true."

"Can you promise that?" said Madge, looking steadily into his eyes. "A man has so many diversions and temptations! Ambition, the power of choice, riches, impunity; and a man scarcely deserves the name if he is not ambitious! I am sure *you* are *very*."

"Perhaps so," said Brook. "Thanks for your opinion. But, Madge, mere riches would not satisfy me. I want power and place. I feel capable of good work and I want to do it. In England the road to distinction lies through the fens and morasses of politics. To make these passable you must pave your path with gold."

"I understand. You will succeed, I fancy, for you would be daring to seize what you desire to have, and ruthless in sweeping away what stands between you and it."

"What a strange girl you are, Madge. And how dare you give me so bad a character! What put such ideas into your pretty little brown head?"

"I do not know. My mother had Highland blood. Perhaps it is a touch of second sight."

"Worse and worse," cried Brook, laughing. Then his face darkened suddenly and his deep blue eyes lit up with a quick fire. "My God! Madge," he exclaimed, "if ever you meet a man strong enough to dominate you, if you threw sense, philosophy, self-

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control to the winds, what a delicious woman you would be to love!"

"May God avert it!" murmured Madge, in a tone of prayer.

They were both silent for a moment. Then Brook, rousing himself, glanced at the clock.

"Alas! the fatal hour has struck, or is about to strike. I have work to do this night, and I must see you safely home, if home it can be called. It will be some time before I can again enjoy such an interesting talk. Do you know, my puzzling little friend, what a relief, what a refreshment, a confidential talk with you is?"

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

Though not feeling the need of unburdening her mind as much as most young women, Madge, with the curious inclination to tell more to a friend of lower station than to an equal or superior, which is not uncommon, was quite ready to say to her faithful "Pinny" what a pleasant evening she had had, and certainly to shew her the present she had received. For, in truth, she was not a little proud of the interest (whether it was love or friendship) which Brook evinced in her; and though she never quite let herself go she did enjoy talking about him occasionally to Mrs. Pinnock.

But that excellent friend herself stopped the flow of her confidence. At the first touch of the bell the door was gently opened, and before Madge could say good-night to her "cavalier" Mrs. Pinnock whispered:

"Come in, my dear, come in! Don't stop!" and nearly shut the door in Brook's face.

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"Just get to bed at once, Miss Margaret," she continued. "The master has been that restless and uneasy that I have felt quite anxious about him. I think he has gone to sleep now, and it would never do to wake him up."

"Do you think he is ill?"

"He can't be well. He went to bed directly you drove away and I had got out my needlework, when about an hour after he came downstairs in his dressing-gown as I was sitting by the kitchen fire, a thing he hasn't done, not for years, my dear. Says he: 'Why does that young man trouble about a plain little girl like my granddaughter?' 'I suppose partly because he is young,' I made answer, setting a chair for him. He sat down. 'I don't think I'd make a fool of myself for a girl like that.' You'll not mind my repeating his words, Miss Margaret?"

"Not at all," said Madge.

They had crept softly up to the latter's bedroom, and then spoke in subdued tones.

"'Ah,' says he," continued Mrs. Pinnock, "'if you had seen the girl I loved and that loved me, and gave herself to me to be poor and **starving**—oh, my God! my God!' And the poor dear **old man** covered up his face and rocked himself **to and fro**. 'That girl reminds me of her sometimes, with **stray** looks and tones. I don't know whether I **hate** her or not for it. There are moments when I'd like to starve her!' he says, quite fierce-like. 'When I seem to know she is sent by the yellow fiend to distract me, yet her eyes draw me to her. How sweet the *other* eyes were! **They** were full of love to the last.'

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Then he was silent a bit. Next he said: 'Don't you let us have any superfluities. What have you in the larder, eh?'

" 'Well, come and see,' I says to humour him, and I lit a candle. He went quick to look. There wasn't a thing in the place but some beef bones I had been stewing for soup, and a basin of dripping. If you'll believe me, Miss Margaret, it was so uncanny to see him poking around with eyes like a hawk's, I was all of a tremble. He seemed satisfied, however, and, taking hold of the basin of dripping, he carried it into the kitchen.

" 'Bring me some bread,' he says, 'and a knife.' So I did, and was pleased to see him spread the dripping on a good thick slice and eat it up quite sweet. 'Don't you buy any butter while this lasts,' says he. And then I spoke up, pleasant like.

" 'Well, Mr. Ardell, sir, I have never gone beyond the money you allow, and saved you what trouble I could. Won't you let me manage my own way still?' He was silent for a bit. Then says he: 'I think you are a sensible woman, and I don't mind telling you that I believe Brook, who has been my friend up till now, and Margaret are scheming to marry and get my money. He *loves* money, and *wants* money. But you tell him, if you have a chance, that never, never shall either of them have a sou of my yellow treasure! The all-powerful cash—which the fiend kept from me till it was too late—too, too late!—to spend and enjoy themselves with—never! I'll tie it up—it shall be locked away for a hundred years before any living soul shall touch it or enjoy it.' He

spoke as if his words were a curse. With that he got up, lit his candle and went away upstairs. I heard him creeping about some time after, but he has been in his room, and quite quiet for some time. I am thankful to have you back."

"It was all very eerie," said Madge, and paused. "I hope he will leave some of his money to Mr. Brook."

"Will you give him a hint?"

"Perhaps so! But it will not be easy," returned Madge, with a smile. "Good-night, Pinny dear. I am tired, but I have enjoyed myself. My poor old grandfather! What bitter memories he must have! I wish we could sweep them away."

"I wish he'd come to his right mind and leave his money, or most of it, to you!" rejoined Mrs. Pinnock. "I've stayed too long," and, carefully lighting her candle with the remains of a defunct match, she departed to her own room, which, Madge rejoiced to think, was next door.

Though somewhat disturbed by Mrs. Pinnock's narrative, the recollection of the delightful hours she had passed with Brook obliterated everything, and the sound of his rich, refined voice was still in her ears as sleep stole over her.

The next morning, however, she was up betimes, anxious to ascertain Waring's opinion of her work.

"Shall I take my grandfather his breakfast?" she asked Mrs. Pinnock. "I am a little curious to see how he will look upon me."

"He is sleeping still, and I'll let him sleep. It is just meat and drink to him. Bless me, Miss Margaret, what a beautiful ring you have!"

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"Yes, isn't it? Mr. Brook bought it for me in Paris."

"Well, Miss Margaret, I'm sure he is a real gentleman, and generous. Don't you see what he means? He means you are to wear *that* ring till he puts another plainer one on."

"Do you really think he means that?"

"Of course he does! It is as plain as the nose on your face. I only wish——" Mrs. Pinnock stopped short.

"What *do* you wish?"

"Oh, never mind. I'd vex you if I went on."

"Then I had better go to the studio. I am very anxious to know what Mr. Waring will say about my illustrations."

Waring was already expecting his pupil when she arrived. He was in high spirits, and looked, Madge thought, so bright, so kindly, so animated, that he was absolutely handsome.

"I thought you intended to be early this morning," he exclaimed, shaking hands cordially, "and it is half-past ten!"

"Did you **expect** me sooner? I was afraid I was a little too soon."

"As if **such a** pupil as you are could ever be too soon! **Come, take off your hat, and we'll go through your illustrations.** I have been remiss of late as regards my duties towards you, but I have had a lot of business to attend to. I shall be a better 'guide, philosopher, and friend' (if you will allow me to call myself so) in future. I am very pleased with your work. Really, some of it is excellent." And he took

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her long, slender, cold hand into his own large one, with a kindly, friendly pressure, which Madge unhesitatingly returned, smiling up in his face and saying:

"If anyone could bring me luck, it would be yourself."

"We'll see," returned Waring, cheerfully. And he turned to a table, whereon Madge's drawings were laid out, and went into a profound discussion of their merits and demerits, from which Madge gathered many useful hints.

"Next week," said Waring, "I have a model coming to pose for that picture I intend doing for the Academy, and I want you also to paint her. Women are more difficult than men. Now, I am obliged to go out on a most important errand!"

"That generally means to the Stock Exchange, doesn't it?"

"No, no. I'll not fritter away the few pounds I make. I go rather to expend than to acquire. I am going to my tailor to be fitted for my wedding coat!"

"Your wedding coat!" echoed Madge, her eyes lighting up with interest. "Oh, to whom are you going to be married, and where? I must come and see your wedding."

"Mine? Oh, I am going to wither on in old bachelorhood. But I am going to be best man to Martin at his marriage to my sister-in-law. He is a very good fellow, and she is in great luck. Indeed, so am I."

Madge opened her brown eyes, and then burst out laughing.

"Now I understand Ella!" she said.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

MADGE returned to Osborne-place in a happier mood than she had known since her aunt had been taken from her. Her gratitude to Waring for his hearty friendship was something tranquillising and sustaining, but it never made her pulses beat with the excitement which permeated her being after an interview with Brook—in spite of her deep conviction that there was some barrier between them, which he had never explained—that in spite of his evident passion for her she would always be second in his mind, or his heart, to his ambition, or whatever was the dominant chord in his scheme of life.

Her chief anxiety on the present occasion, however, was the task of writing to Brook. This seemed to her a tremendous undertaking: yet she resolved to lose no time in setting about it. It was a very raw, cold day, and she felt glad to be indoors with "Pinny," who received her with suppressed eagerness.

"What do you think, Miss Margaret, my dear? So soon as you were gone, the master rang for me, and ate up his breakfast better than I have known him for many a day. Then he asked what sort of weather it was, and worried a bit about sending a telegram to Mr. Briggs. At last he said he didn't want to die just yet, and wrote the telegram asking Mr. Briggs to come. He is here now in Mr. Ardell's own room. I hardly had time to make it look nice

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and tidy before he came. Now the place is all a litter of papers, and when your grandpapa will be able to eat a mouthful I don't know! Anyhow, I have kept your bit warm."

This intelligence made Madge still more desirous to get her letter written, and as soon as Mrs. Pinnock had the table cleared, she carried down her writing materials to the kitchen, which was much the most comfortable room in the house, and set seriously to work.

The beginning was always a difficulty, for she never quite understood the terms on which they stood towards each other.

"I had better err on the side of coolness," she reflected. "I am lost if he learns the power he has over me."

"I think I ought to let you know what Mrs. Pinnock told me about my grandfather after you left last night," she began, unceremoniously. "It may be important to you—if I am mistaken, forgive me." She then proceeded to recapitulate shortly and clearly Mrs. Pinnock's details, winding up with the unusual fact that Mr. Ardell had sent for his solicitor, and was now closeted with him. "Keep this, or destroy it, as you think best," she concluded. "I should like to hear if you have received it, and what you think. *If* you have time—but not unless—let me know. My warmest thanks for all your kindness.

"Always yours, most truly,

"M."

Having read this epistle through, and endeavoured to make some "rough places smooth" in vain, Madge wrote it all over again, and, with a

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despairing sigh at her own caligraphic imperfections, closed and stamped it, taking it herself to the post.

The next few days were diversified by visits from Mr. Briggs and a much more distinguished-looking person, who was, Mrs. Pinnock asserted, his clerk.

Christmas was now close at hand, and Mrs. Waring's wedding-day had dawned, an auspicious morning which brought Madge a somewhat thick envelope by a messenger. This proved to be a few lines from Waring, enclosing a couple of bank notes, and stating that he had made the publishers of the child's book pay up, and telling her that they must begin serious work on the following week, when the wedding festivities would be over and almost forgotten. Also a still more precious note from Brook.

"You are the sweetest and most thoughtful little friend any man was ever blessed with possessing. I thank you heartily for your information. There was a time when ignorance of your grandfather's intentions might have been very unlucky to me. It is no longer of much matter. I am sure his testamentary dispositions will be very eccentric. Let us hope this may defeat his own ends, and his property may then go to his natural heir or heiress. I have acted on your sensible suggestion and destroyed your letter. The most innocent scribblings are liable to strange misconstructions, so you had better 'do as you would be done by.' I hope for another confidential talk in two or three days, for I have had a long fast.

"Yours ever,

"H. C. B."

Life seemed a far better thing to Margaret Ardell now than it had done seven or eight months ago, when, feeling herself to be the most desolate and

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hopeless little waif in the whole world, she sobbed herself to sleep that first wretched night under her grandfather's inhospitable roof.

Brook was a source of delight not unmixed with pain. But there was also her good and generous friend, Dick Waring. His services to her could never be repaid. He had given her the chance of earning her own bread; of independence which could never be taken from her so long as health and strength were hers.

"How good and true and simple he is," she thought. "And what a real artist! What a broad way he has of looking at things. I do hope he will not marry. His wife would never like me nor I her. Artists, male or female, are better unmarried."

So Madge determined to take courage, to look forward with hope, and to work diligently in the present.

Meantime, Mr. Ardell had frequent and prolonged visits from his solicitor, and made many alterations in his deeply-pondered will, over the clauses of which he had various differences of opinion with his legal adviser. The old man gave Mrs. Pinnock and Madge less trouble than formerly, as he now seldom asked to go out of doors. A remark from his granddaughter seemed to have impressed him. He was almost feverishly desirous of going to the Law Courts one very cold, unsuitable day, and Madge ventured to suggest the likelihood of his taking cold, adding:

"You must now allow the yellow fiend a chance of having it all his own way. If you killed your-

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self with cold before you have settled your affairs the yellow fiend would seize everything and do endless mischief."

"Eh, what's that? Seize all I have? There may be some truth in what you say." He meditated deeply for a few moments, and resumed, thoughtfully: "I am never quite sure if it's a 'he' or a 'she,' only I feel it's a 'he.' A spirit is neither male nor female, I believe, but I fancy a female could not be quite so cruel. Then if it's a 'he' *you* could not be the yellow fiend, as I am sometimes half-afraid you are! Though at other times I like to look in your eyes. They seem kind and pitiful."

"Indeed, I should like to be nice and useful to you, if you would let me," said Madge, softly. "I will read all the trials to you gladly, but do not go out." And the old man stayed at home.

So they settled down to their old routine. Madge worked every morning diligently in Waring's studio, and won many kind words of approval and encouragement from her friendly teacher. Indeed, since his sister-in-law's marriage he seemed in a very happy mood. The happy bridegroom could only afford himself a very brief honeymoon. "Mammon" is a relentless taskmaster, and the Stock Exchange claimed him as its own.

Mrs. Martin was immensely busy furnishing the fine mansion they had chosen previous to their marriage. Ella was preparing herself for the brilliant career before her in a Parisian finishing school of the highest "tone," and the studio knew her no more.

## CHAPTER XXV.

ONE afternoon, early in the New Year, Madge had settled, after due consultation with "Pinny," to devote the remaining hour or two of daylight to shopping, as she needed some items of clothing, with which she could not well dispense, and for which she thanked God she could pay. She even had her hat on and was looking for her worst pair of gloves when Mrs. Pinnock came rapidly upstairs.

"Miss Margaret, my dear, you mustn't go out just yet. The master says Mr. Briggs and someone else are coming at four o'clock, and he will want you to be present. So keep indoors. Maybe he is going to tell you he has made his will in your favour after all. He has been growing quite fond of you just lately, my dear lamb!"

Madge shook her head. "Don't fancy anything of the kind, Pinny," she said. "There is always a dash of dislike in my grandfather's liking. But, of course, I will not go out."

"Well, that's all I ask. The poor old gentleman is all of a tremble. I'm going to coax him to take a cup of arrowroot with a little port wine. You'll make your hair nice and tidy, miss, won't you?"

Madge smiled, and promised proper attention to her appearance; postponing her shopping expedition with regret.

She certainly felt a little curious as to what her grandfather could possibly want with her. She

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seemed to count for so little in his life. This made her unoccupied waiting for Mr. Briggs extremely irksome, for he was considerably behind time.

The evening had closed in, and the lamp had just been lit, when the legal adviser and a clerk arrived, and Madge was then summoned.

"Miss Ardell, I presume?" said the solicitor, an old-fashioned, polite personage, rising and making her an elaborate bow.

"Yes, yes. Tell her, Briggs—tell her," returned Mr. Ardell.

"The business on which we are met together is a very simple matter," resumed Mr. Briggs. "It is——" Here a loud ring at the door bell made him pause.

"I can't see anyone. I won't see anyone!" cried Mr. Ardell, as if exasperated.

No one stirred, and the next moment Mrs. Pinnock opened the door, saying, in a loud voice:

"Mr. Brook, sir."

Madge's heart gave a great throb, and then seemed to stand still. She flashed one irrepressible glance at him all aglow with the joy his presence gave her, and then moved a step back into the shadow.

"Brook!" cried the old man, rising from his chair. "The very person I wanted. You shall be my second witness."

"I am quite at your service for any purpose," returned Brook, shaking hands with Madge and then the lawyer, who greeted him with some *empressement*.

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"I was just about to explain to Miss Ardell what she has to do as witness to her grandfather's will."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the old man, with a chuckle. "It is very simple, and Mr. Brook here, who has been my good friend, will put his name beside hers as witness also to my signature."

He laughed, not a pleasant laugh. Then he took up his pen, and was about to put his name on the paper, which the clerk smoothed out and held down before him.

"One moment, my dear sir," cried Brook, suavely. "I may be mistaken, but I do not think Miss Ardell is of age."

"Oh! Um! Indeed! May I ask what—how old you really are?" said Mr. Briggs.

"I was twenty in December," replied Madge, with a pretty, faint blush.

"Oh, indeed! Just a year too young. Well, Mr. Alton," to his clerk, "we shall have to trouble you after all."

"Ha! I forgot about her age," cried Ardell. "I thought she was of age." There was a tone of disappointment in his voice. "However, let us get through with the business." And he hastily wrote his name in wonderfully clear, firm characters, for so apparently weak a person. Brook followed, and then the clerk.

"She needn't stay," said the old man, nodding towards Madge, who immediately rose and left the room.

"I am sure, my dear sir," said the courteous

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lawyer, "I am truly pleased to see you have so charming a companion for your declining years."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Ardell, almost fiercely.

"Your granddaughter. Such a very nice young lady!"

"Companion!" Mr. Ardell went on, without heeding him. "How could a flimsy creature like that be a companion to me—*me*? She is of no use whatever, and I have to feed and lodge her, and later on to clothe her. Why, it is infamous—infamous!"

"Well, Mr. Ardell, it seems to be the destiny of elders like you and me to provide for the young. But as we have finished this little bit of business, I must wish you good-morning. I am quite over-driven at present with the press of work."

At these words he began to fold up the newly-signed will, and put it in an official-looking envelope. He was about to consign it to an inner pocket when the old man called out:

"What are you doing?"

"I presumed you would wish your will kept with the rest of your papers."

"I prefer to keep it myself," returned Mr. Ardell, drily.

But his legal adviser knew him of old, and returned him the document with an indulgent smile.

Then, rising, he and his employé took leave of their important client, and accompanied by Brook went to put on their overcoats in the hall.

"I am a good deal put out about this—this will," said Mr. Briggs, almost in a whisper. "I declare to

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you I have fought him tooth and nail over every clause. It is unjust—extremely unjust. But, of course, a professional secret must be respected.”

“Has it any weak places?” asked Brook, with a smile.

“I fear not—I greatly fear not. But perhaps you’ll look in at my office. Saturday, about two, is a good hour. Eh?”

“I’ll come,” was the brief reply. Then they exchanged good-mornings, and Brook shut the door after them.

Returning to Mr. Ardell with a cheerful face, Brook at once began to speak about indifferent matters, and gave him some interesting details respecting a once very prosperous joint stock company, now gone into liquidation. Also of an expected lawsuit concerning a large property in the north. The old man grew interested and gracious, and at the right moment Brook rose to say good-bye.

“By the way,” he exclaimed, as if with a sudden thought, “would you object to Miss Ardell coming with me to see the pantomime at Drury-lane? It is something extra fine this year, and will amuse a young lady who has not much variety.”

“Eh? What is it? Oh, the theatre again! It is nothing to me; you understand my ideas pretty well, so do as you like.”

“Exactly,” returned Brook, with emphasis. “Well, may I see Miss Ardell and ask what evening she is disengaged?”

“Yes, yes; ring the bell. But she is never engaged. How could she be? She has no friends.”

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"Perhaps. But she has a lover who will know how to make life worth living when he has won and tamed the strange, distrustful little darling," thought Brook.

"Tell Margaret to come here," said her grandfather, as Mrs. Pinnock put her head into the room. And Madge came quickly.

The proposed visit to the pantomime was soon arranged for the following evening.

Then Mr. Ardell told Mrs. Pinnock that he would have some dinner as soon as it could be got ready, and go into his own room, as he had letters to write. So she must let out the parlour fire and light one in his room—a mandate she hastened to obey.

Madge's visit to the pantomime was much the same delightful sort of expedition she had always enjoyed with Brook. She kept herself well "on guard," but he was more serious than usual. He pointed out the cynicism implied by Mr. Ardell's choosing her as a witness, also himself. But he might make another will any day, which did not seem to interest Madge, who laughed at the notion of her weakly grandfather having the strength to make another will.

"The history of will making would, if written, disclose the most extraordinary eccentricities. It is quite impossible that the vagaries of testators can be anticipated," said Brook.

"Then let us not trouble about my grandfather's," said Madge, who was greatly diverted by the pantomime. Indeed, she had never seen a similar style of entertainment before. and though she was gen-

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erally grave and thoughtful, she had a keen sense of humour, which added considerably to the piquancy and charm of her personality.

Brook was genuinely sorry when the evening was over, and tried to make Madge confess she was equally sorry to part. This she did with a frankness which neutralised the flattery and was really the most subtle coquetry.

"It would be strange indeed if I did not regret saying good-night to so kind and agreeable a companion as yourself, to return to such a gloomy dungeon as my grandfather's house. I *do* wish he would leave you all his money, if he has a great deal."

"Don't you want some yourself, you strange little philosopher?"

"Artists don't want much. I do not care for fine houses, or clothes, or anything that costs much. I daresay you would give me something to go on with till I made enough for myself, though that might not be for a very long time."

"I wish I dare tell you *all* I should like to give you," murmured Brook, pressing her arm against him (they were leaving the theatre), and feeling the slight tremor she could not suppress, which shivered through her at his words and the warmth with which they were uttered.

He was silent nearly all the way back to Osborne-place and they parted with a promise to meet again soon.

It was more than a week before Waring settled down to his picture, as the model he had engaged

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chose to have a bad cold. Then the weather was dark and foggy. But they got to work at last, and Madge was not a little disappointed with her own attempts. Dick Waring was infinitely patient and encouraging.

"Perseverance is the largest ingredient in success," he said. "Just go on. 'Try, try, try again,' as the nursery rhyme says."

"Then I waste such heaps of paint," moaned Madge. "Now that I have made some money by illustrating, I should like to buy my own paints."

"Come, come, Miss Ardell! You must not be querulous and ungracious. Your grandfather is rather crotchety, I believe. Do you think I might call on him and ask him to come here and see the progress you are making? Then he might be persuaded to give you an allowance for the etceteras of your art."

"It is quite out of the question, I am sorry to say. He never sees anyone except his lawyer and his great, his only friend, Mr. Brook."

"What! The man who took you to Hatfield?"

"Yes. My grandfather is very strange. He has a curious strain of ill-nature in him. I could not help laughing one day some little time back," and Madge went on to describe the scene when Mr. Ardell signed his will, adding:

"As I am his only relation, and Mr. Brook his only friend, he evidently wished to put an end at once to any absurd hopes we might have built upon his will. He looked quite disappointed when he

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found I was of no use as a witness. Mr. Briggs, the lawyer, seemed troubled and ashamed."

"I see," said Waring, smiling. "Of course, no one who benefits by a will is competent to witness it."

"So they tell me," said Madge, beginning to put her paints and brushes in order, previous to leaving.

"You are not going?" said Waring, who had been whistling over his work in a thoughtful way. "I'm going to lunch here for a wonder. Do give me the pleasure of your company. I feel my loneliness more every day."

"I wish I could stay," said Madge, with sincerity. "But Pinny—I mean Mrs. Pinnock—expects me back and would think something had gone wrong. I do not like to worry her, for, after all, she is the only person that cares about me."

Waring had laid aside his palette and brush and walked over to the fireplace, where he stood leaning his shoulder against the mantelpiece. He kept silent for an instant, then he exclaimed:

"Don't say that, Madge, dear Madge. Is it possible you have not seen, nor felt, how I rejoice at your coming and repine at your going? That the most passionate wish of my heart is to call you my wife? That I would care for you and teach you to love me, if tenderness could, for I do not think you care for *me now*, dear, but we have a good many things in common. Will you risk it, sweetheart, and take me for better, for worse? I have held my tongue for such a long, weary time. Now I am a free man, and all I desire is your own dear self. You

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also are free, for your grandfather has practically disowned you. Come to me, and your life shall be as happy and tranquil as the hearty affection of one devoted to you can make it."

A moment of dead silence followed Waring's startling avowal, while Madge grew white, and then flushed to the roots of her hair.

"Speak to me!" he urged.

"I am the most unlucky girl in the world," she broke out. "I like you so much. I think you have so fine a nature. I am so grateful to you, yet I cannot marry you."

"Why? Have you promised yourself to another?"

"No. But I cannot love you as you ought to be loved, as your wife ought to love you."

"Can I not try to win you?"

"It would only give you pain and trouble."

"Tell me," asked Waring, very gravely, "have you pledged yourself to this friend of your grandfather's—Brook?"

"No, oh, no, indeed!"

"What is it, then, that keeps you from me?"

Madge was silent, and seemed to think deeply for a few seconds. Then she spoke with some hesitation.

"I was more than nineteen when I came to my grandfather's house, and I had not lived in a convent. Do you think that Mr. Brook and yourself are the only two men I have ever met?"

"No, certainly not. I will question you no more; I have no right. Do not imagine I flattered myself that you gave me a serious thought, but I *did* hope with all my soul that I might have a chance."

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"I wish—I wish I could be all you desire," said Madge, with a sob. "It would be better for myself, but I cannot, I cannot!"

Waring walked once or twice to and fro, and his countenance grew a little brighter.

"Listen to me," he said, stopping beside her and taking her hand very gently. "I am awfully annoyed at having spoken too soon, as I feel I have done. Do not break with me because I did not keep the reins of my self-control. Forget that I wanted to be your lover. I swear to you that I will be your friend till something—some unforeseen change in your present position—may once more give me a chance. You must *not* give up your painting. I shall feel it a cruel mark of distrust if you refuse to come as usual to the studio. I *must* work at my Academy picture, and you may as well take advantage of the model. When I have got the picture up to a certain stage I shall go away for a while. Meanwhile, forget I ever intruded myself on you in so unacceptable a character. Do not break away altogether. I only ask to be of some use to you, and, my dear little friend, you may want me yet."

Madge hesitated. She would gladly have said good-bye to him for an indefinite time, but she dreaded to interfere with his work, and knew that the best cure for his present state of mind was the interest which his own conceptions must always possess for an artist.

"I will do anything you wish," she exclaimed. "And if you will only give me your friendship I shall still have some hope of being happy. Indeed, Mr.

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Waring, I should not make a nice or a good wife. I don't manage well ; I have no taste for domesticity. I think I should get rather tired of a man I was married to, and my temper is queer. You see, I like variety. *You* are good and true. Yet you might punish cruelly. You are very English !" She hesitated in some confusion.

"There is no use in running yourself down, Madge. If you will treat me as if I never had let myself go, I shall be proud of such a mark of esteem."

"Now one can esteem you more highly than I do," said Madge, tremulously. "Now I must go away. It is getting late."

"Good-bye, then, till to-morrow at the usual time."

"Yes, good-bye till to-morrow."

He went downstairs with her, and they parted with a lingering hand pressure.

"Well, Miss Margaret, I was just going to put on my bonnet and look for you," exclaimed Mrs. Pinnock, when she opened the door to her young lady.

"Oh, I am quite safe always. But I did not think it was so late."

She did not add that she had taken a turn round the adjacent square to compose herself before she presented herself to Pinny's kindly but searching eyes.

"Well, come along, my dear. I've kept a bit of dinner warm for you. And what do you think? Mr. Brook was up here between twelve and one. He had a little talk with Mr. Ardell. Then he drove

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off again as if he was in a hurry. The master, he noticed it, for when I brought up his dinner, says he: 'I think I was mistaken in that young man.' He kept his cab waiting all the time he was here. He must have taken it by the hour. 'If he goes on like that,' says the master, 'the yellow fiend will get the better of him and take every fraction from him, and send him to die in a ditch. The less I have to do with him the better.' He seemed vexed like, and hardly ate a bit," a complaint Mrs. Pinnock felt obliged to reiterate against Madge herself half-an-hour later.

"I daresay your dinner wasn't as comfortable as I'd wish, but when you are an hour behind our time, Miss Margaret——"

"Oh, yes, I know," interrupted Madge. "You are too good to me, Pinny. I am not hungry to-day, and nothing could have tempted me to eat. Now, as I have a book about painters and their systems, I shall sit here with it by the fire and idle till my grandfather wants me."

"Yes, do, my dear. You just work too hard; you want more holidays." And Mrs. Pinnock applied herself to "washing up" before sitting down to her needlework in a noiseless way, not to disturb her companion, who rarely indulged in reading.

But Madge's attention wandered from her book. She thought of Waring with the tenderest regret. If she could but save him from the pain of disappointment, the wretchedness of shattered hope! He was so good, so unselfish! What could she do to heal his wounds? If he would only fall in love with

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someone else! Then, to her own surprise, she found the idea was quite disagreeable.

"I must be a monster of greed to want everything from so dear a friend as Dick Waring, and give him nothing. Am I the making of a bad, base, selfish woman? How can I tell? Here—all alone and untempted—I hate and despise selfishness, I shrink from its injustice, but——" Her thoughts grew mixed, and swept back in full tide to the most absorbing topic in her mind.

It was a great trial to return next day, as usual, to the studio, yet she would not disappoint Waring. Nor did she like confessing by her action, that she was too weak to face him.

So she screwed her courage to the sticking point, and presented herself with a quiet and smiling aspect just a little later than she ought to be, hoping (and not in vain) to find the model installed and Waring at work. This first encounter, therefore, passed over with much less embarrassment than she anticipated.

So things fell into their ordinary routine for a good many days—in short, till Waring had made a very admirable study (for his purpose) of his model, and Madge a good, though unflattering, likeness of the same subject. Then Waring discovered that he must go out of town on business, and would be absent a week or so. He begged Madge to continue using his studio, as she would probably receive another commission from the publishers of the child's book.

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Parting for a while was a relief to both; but Madge felt she could not now use his rooms with the unembarrassed frankness which made them so great a resource.

The difficulty, however, was solved for her in rather an unpleasant manner.

A day or two after Waring had left town, Madge received a few lines from Brook, asking for tidings of her, and expressing his annoyance at having been hurried away without seeing her.

"This time," he wrote, "it was the severe illness of one in whom I am deeply interested which carried me off so suddenly. I will tell you more when we meet."

"He can be very sympathetic," mused Madge, as she read this communication. "I wonder when he will come back. I had better write a line at once, for my head aches, and I feel as if I were going to have a horrid cold. Then, as I must go out for Pinny this afternoon, I can post it myself."

It was a miserably wet day, raw, cold, and blowing in gusts. Madge, having written a brief reply to Brook, wrapped herself up to the best of her ability and sallied forth. Before she had accomplished the round of household shopping which Mrs. Pinnock's commissions entailed, she felt that her boots must be more defective than she was aware of. Her feet were so cold and sloppy.

She passed a feverish, restless night, and, though she rose the next morning, Mrs. Pinnock sent her to bed before the day was over; and, to her surprise, Madge found herself quite willing to go. An attack

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of something like influenza ensued, which lingered long, and reduced the patient considerably.

Wonderful to relate, at the remonstrance of Mr. Briggs, who seemed miraculously informed of her illness, her grandfather had immediately agreed to Mrs. Pinnock's suggestion that a doctor should be sent for.

"I don't want her to die in the house," muttered the old man. "No, I have had but one death in my house, and that was worse than a hundred. It was the yellow fiend's biggest triumph! If he succeeds *this* time, he'll get the better of me in everything else. She may be the victim, as well as the agent. I wish I knew—I wish I knew if she is for or against him."

"Poor lamb! She only wishes well to you, sir!"

"Evil to me would do *her* no good, anyway. Try and get her well soon. I like her to read the papers to me. Yes, I like it."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Waring returned to London and his daily round, he was much exercised in his mind by Madge's absence, and, after waiting a few days, wrote a note of inquiry, expressing an earnest hope that she was not going to give up her studies.

To this came a tardy reply, written very illegibly, as if her hand could scarcely guide her pen, and telling him she had been quite ill with a bad cold, but was now recovering.

It seemed terrible to Waring that a fragile little creature like Madge, so naturally despondent, although curiously enduring, should be ill and suffering in the house of her miserly grandfather.

"Thank God she has that stout, sensible woman, Mrs. Pinnock, to stand by her. I'll go and beard the old lion, or tiger, in his den, and ask about my inexorable sweetheart. Would to Heaven I had the right to take care of her and cheer her up! She is such a strange, unorthodox little soul, but has a true heart, or I am very much mistaken. I must find out how matters are going on, and if I can help her."

It was with some surprise that, on opening the door at the unaccustomed sound of the visitors' bell, Mrs. Pinnock found, not Brook, but her son's friend, Waring.

"Do you think Mr. Ardell would see me?" he asked, after greeting the housekeeper cordially. "I want to make his acquaintance, and talk to him about

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his granddaughter. It might be of some use to her if I had more than a side entrance to his house."

"Well, indeed it might, sir. I'll go and ask him, anyhow."

"Thank you. Here's my card; and how is Miss Ardell? I am afraid she has had a bad attack."

"Yes, she is very weak still, and that thin! She looks all eyes. Step in, please. The master has not long finished his dinner, and he may be feeling stronger for a bit."

She opened the dining-room door and disappeared.

Mr. Ardell was rather laboriously writing a letter, and sitting very near the fire.

"What? Who?" he asked, in a resentful tone, and scanning the card handed to him with eager, anxious eyes. "I do not know him, never did any business with him. Is he asking for any subscription, eh?"

"Not at all, sir. He's the gentleman Miss Margaret goes to learn painting with; and if you could see all the beautiful things he has in his rooms, you wouldn't suspect him of troubling you about money!"

"Humph! Ah, well, let him come in."

As Waring crossed the threshold, he encountered the keen, suspicious eyes of the old man, who was not without perception, however, for as his visitor entered, Mr. Ardell rose, as if recognising a gentleman.

"I hope you do not think me intrusive," said Dick, in his hearty, pleasant tones. "But, growing uneasy at Miss Ardell's prolonged absence from the

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studio, where we were all much interested in her, I ventured to call and ask the reason. I consider your granddaughter a most promising pupil, and I am sorry her studies should be interrupted."

Mr. Ardell resumed his seat, and Dick Waring drew a chair forward.

"Ah!" said the old man, taking off his spectacles and playing with them, drawing them through his fingers, opening and shutting them. "First of all," he returned, in a thin, weak, but well-bred voice, "I never placed my granddaughter at your academy, or whatever it may be; therefore, you have no claim whatever on me for remuneration, or money expended, or anything else. You are aware of this, I hope?"

"Certainly; quite aware of it. You see, my niece was then working with me, and I thought it a pity that Miss Ardell should not share her studies, especially as your granddaughter had ability and diligence. So she was quite welcome to any help I could give her. In a year or two I believe she will be able to stand alone and make her living without troubling anyone."

"Humph! Then she ought to refund what she has cost me. She was thrown upon me when left homeless and unprovided for, and it is now nearly a year since I have given her board and lodging, and all I have ever received from her was ten shillings. All, upon my word!"

"I am sure Miss Ardell would gladly repay what she has cost you, and no doubt will as she gets on.

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But expenditure on her account must have been very small?"

"Money had to be expended, nevertheless. And what can a painter make?"

"Uncommonly little for many a day, as I know. Then suddenly some day he strikes oil and makes his pile."

"Has that been your case, eh?"

"Well, yes. I have known some very hard times. Now, without any special merit on my part, I get good prices and more work than I can well do, while I am half-ashamed to think how many better artists than myself can scarcely gain bread enough."

"Indeed! Then," lowering his voice, "the yellow fiend favours *you*, that is evident. There is nothing so unjust, so intermittent as the yellow fiend."

"Oh! I am not sure I caught the name. At any rate, I do not understand the allusion."

"Probably—probably. Very few people have learnt the real explanation of luck and ill luck. The yellow fiend is the spirit that governs or permeates gold, or emanates from it. And everyone above a pauper has to battle with it!"

"A curious and interesting theory," said Waring, looking keenly at him. "I fear Miss Ardell has had rather a sharp attack of cold or influenza, but I hope—she has a good doctor, and all possible care? She may be a valuable ally in your battle——"

"My battle is nearly done," returned the old man, in a dreamy, distant tone. "I have now only to secure the fruits of it. That is nearly done, too,—very nearly." He was silent for a few instants.

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"I fear I have trespassed too long on you," said Waring, rising as he spoke. "Perhaps you would do me the favour to visit my studio? It is quite near, just at the other side of Tottenham Court-road. You might be interested in some of your granddaughter's work which I have there."

"Thank you; but no, no. What is the use of it all? Of anything? Dust and ashes, all dust and ashes—except gold, solid gold. I want to have all my property in gold, that I can see and handle and pile up. And, Mr.—Mr. Waring," scanning his card once more, "had I known you were coming here to beg I should not have let you in. Good-day, sir, good-day."

Waring laughed good-humouredly. "Very sorry, Mr. Ardell, that you take such a view of my visit. I hope you will not refuse me admittance another time."

"If you want to see Margaret you can come."

"That's something," murmured Waring, as he bowed and left the room, without attempting to offer his hand to the old man.

Youth and an untried constitution enabled Madge to make a rapid recovery, once the subtle fever, generally called influenza, was subdued, and to this a short, but expressive note from Brook contributed.

"The news of your illness," he wrote, "overwhelmed me. I never thought that disease, in any form, could touch your pale, delicate healthiness. It is cruel that I cannot see you and satisfy myself as to your condition. When may I hope to exchange

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words with you, to hear your voice? Send me a line as soon as you can write without fatigue."

Need it be said that Brook was not let wait long for a reply.

The days were lengthening, and spring was making its breath felt, sometimes genially, sometimes with a touch of youthful bitterness, when Madge was able to resume her reading to Mr. Ardell. And it was under his curiously indifferent eyes that she first interchanged her greeting with Brook, after a separation of unusual length.

"I am glad to see Miss Ardell looking more like herself," said Brook. "But she will not recover strength till she has some change and country air. I wish you would commission me to look out quarters for her. I think I know some that would suit, and inexpensive ones into the bargain."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" cried the old man, with vehemence. "Do you think I shall waste the trifle I have saved on such follies when I want every fraction I possess to combat my deadly foe?"

"Still——" began Brook.

"No, no. She can walk about the square. It is good enough air for me and for everyone."

"Then I shall say good-morning, since I cannot move you," returned Brook, with an amiable smile, looking earnestly at Madge; and he succeeded in his design of silently asking her to come out and speak to him.

As he moved towards the door Madge rose, as she had often done before, to open it, when, to her sur-

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prise and dismay, her grandfather cried in a loud, shrill tone:

"Stop!"

Brook paused and faced about.

"Stay where you are!" continued the old man. "You shall not go out of this room to plot against me."

Madge and Brook glanced at each other, and the latter exclaimed, in a light tone:

"Ah, Mr. Ardell, you are as penetrating as ever. Only *this* time you have gone a little bit too far on the other side and missed the point."

"There's many a true word spoken in jest. Come and see me again soon. I like you, though I do not trust you."

"What a valediction!" exclaimed Brook. "Forgive me if I refuse to believe you. If you distrusted me you could not like me. So, till you absolutely forbid me the *entrée* of your house I shall have the pleasure of paying my respects to you." He bowed and left the room.

There was profound silence for some minutes. The evening had closed in, and the street lamps, increasing in brilliancy as their surroundings grew darker, shone into the dim chamber.

"Are you going to read to me?" asked Mr. Ardell, impatiently.

"Yes, certainly," returned Madge. "I will get a light and close the shutters."

She remembered seeing a half-consumed candle and a box of matches on the sacred bureau in her grandfather's bedroom, and, being anxious to divert

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his thoughts to something less personal than the irritable suspicion he had betrayed, she groped her way into the next room.

It had not the advantage of light from the street, and as she neared the bureau she stumbled against a chair, making an amount of noise which surprised her. The next moment she felt the matches in her hand and struck a light. As she did so an indefinable sound, like a stealthy step, caught her ear.

Setting a light to the candle, she turned, and beheld her grandfather standing in the doorway, his hand on the lock, his wild, deep-set eyes flaring with an unaccountable fury of indignation.

"Fool, fool, fool!" he cried, in a voice hoarse with anger and contempt. "Did you think to trick me like that! You shall never make a second attempt, never—never! Serpent! Scorpion! Slave of the fiend! I know you now!"

With supernatural activity he darted across the room and seized her by the throat, his long, claw-like nails digging into her soft white skin. Madge struggled bravely.

"You are mistaken. I meant no wrong."

But the impetus of his onset was more than she could resist. She tottered and fell, the enraged madman above, his grasp tightening on her slender throat.

With a desperate effort she dragged his claws for an instant from her throat and called for help. Then the greedy fingers closed again upon her and she knew no more.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

MADGE's semi-unconsciousness lasted scarcely a minute, and she was then aware of swiftly approaching steps, a loud scream of horror, of strong hands tearing away her grandfather's claws, of a sudden blessed sense of safety as she scrambled to her feet, and, though trembling in every limb, she went to help Mrs. Pinnock in raising Mr. Ardell and placing him in his chair.

"God bless us and save us!" gasped Mrs. Pinnock, as the old man lay back exhausted, but still glaring at his granddaughter. "He has gone clean off his head! Sit down, do, my poor dear. You are trembling like an aspen leaf. Do you know, sir, you'd have been a murderer if I'd been a second later? What made you do it, sir? To go for to squeeze the life out of the dear young lady, that's as good as gold! And the strength of him! (To Madge.) If God hadn't given me more than my natural power I never could have loosed his grip. What made you do it?"

"Because she was going to rob me. She stole in here with the key—I know she had the key—to take all my hostages that I had put away there in my bureau, all the representative sums which I kept as security against the yellow fiend! I—I was in my rights." He panted out the words with difficulty.

"Nonsense, Mr. Ardell! You haven't two keys

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for that bureau. Put your hand in your pocket and you'll find the only key that unlocks that bureau, or I'm much mistaken."

"There is no use in speaking to him," cried Madge. "See, he has fainted. I will fetch a light."

For the darkness was only partially dispelled by the gaslight in the hall. When she returned with the lamp from the kitchen the old man lay still and cold, and white as death.

"O Pinny, is he dead?"

"No, I don't think so. I wish we had the doctor. I don't like to leave you alone with him—yet——"

"And I dare not stay. I will go for the doctor."

"I am afraid you must. Just say Mr. Ardell has fainted. Don't let us say he attacked you, it might get about."

Madge rapidly obeyed, amazed at her own sudden recovery of strength.

When the doctor came he ordered Mr. Ardell to bed, remarking that he was in a state of extreme exhaustion, and inquired as to his having received any severe nervous shock.

Mrs. Pinnock was obliged to speak out more than she intended. Still, she kept the old man's attempt on his grandchild's life fairly dark.

"I shall give him a composing draught, but he must not be left alone, nor must *you*, either. Miss Ardell is by no means fit to share your watch. Can I send for a nurse?"

"Not just at first, sir. I will keep by him all night myself, but there's a very respectable woman who comes in to help."

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After staying some little time and giving full instructions—during which Mr. Ardell never spoke or noticed him, save once when he brokenly uttered a warning that he would not pay full price—the doctor departed, promising to send for the ever-ready Mrs. Dabbs, with whose address he was furnished.

Madge hardly knew how the rest of that night passed. She was stupefied with the shock and fatigue, and submitted to be sent to bed by Mrs. Pinnock without a murmur.

Next morning Madge, at Mrs. Pinnock's request, sent a line to inform Mr. Briggs that his client was seriously ill, and that she would be glad if he could call as soon as possible. But she hesitated in writing to Brook. The recollection of her grandfather's rudeness, his curious and unaccountable suspicion of his once favoured friend, made her reluctant to address him.

Mr. Ardell lay in a state of half-sleep, half-unconsciousness for several hours, but Mrs. Pinnock succeeded in rousing him to take some food, and then he seemed fairly himself and quite composed.

When Mr. Briggs arrived his client was well rested, and, having been duly prepared for the interview by his careful housekeeper, did not appear to the lawyer very different from usual.

"I think you have alarmed yourself unnecessarily, Mrs. Pinnock," he said, kindly. "I do not see much difference in Mr. Ardell. He is pretty much as usual. We must expect little ups and downs at his age. I rather think he is close on seventy-six."

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"Well, sir, I can't help thinking he is pretty bad, and I fancy so does the doctor. Of course, Miss Ardell did not like to put it on paper, but——" And she plunged into a brief and not exaggerated account of the old man's attack on his granddaughter.

Mr. Briggs listened with deep attention, his face growing graver and more concerned.

"Well, yes, this is very serious indeed. How is the poor young lady this morning? Have you let Mr. Brook know. He has more influence with Mr. Ardell than anyone else."

"I am not sure, but I do not think Miss Ardell has written to him, sir. Would you like to see Miss Margaret?"

"No time just now, Mrs. Pinnock. I want to try and see the doctor. He is close by, you say?"

"First turning to the left, No. 29," returned Mrs. Pinnock, succinctly.

"I'll look in to-morrow on the way to my office. I'm awfully busy, but this is a rather critical time for our friend here and his granddaughter; also for you and everyone. I must see Mr. Brook. A clever, capable man and a very rising one. Extremely so. He will be at the top of the tree before long." So saying the lawyer hurried away.

This conversation was duly reported to Madge, including Mr. Briggs's avowed intention of informing Brook, which added restless expectation to the already disturbed state of Madge's nerves.

The doctor and Mr. Briggs arrived next day almost together. But Mr. Ardell had rallied surprisingly. He had insisted on rising and very nearly

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dressed himself without assistance. However, he allowed Mrs. Pinnock to persuade him to stay in his bedroom, and, to her great surprise, he asked for his granddaughter, adding that he could not manage to read the papers himself.

"And if she does, sir, you mustn't use her bad," said Mrs. Pinnock, determined to ascertain if he remembered his own violence. "You half-killed her the night before last."

"That's a lie!" cried the old man, fiercely. "I never touched her. But listen!" and he lowered his voice nearly to a whisper. "Don't tell Briggs. The fiend is getting bolder, much bolder. As the Scriptures say, he enters into Madge and makes her do strange things. She isn't bad herself, no, she isn't. It was the fiend I punished the other night, and had I killed *him*, she would have been none the worse—none."

Mrs. Pinnock kept silence, but the danger of this hallucination for Madge struck her with sudden terror. The girl herself shewed great reluctance to approach her grandfather, but Mr. Ardell made no sign. Indeed, he seemed unusually placid and mild.

Madge was beginning to shew signs of fatigue, when the door-bell gave token of a visitor.

"I must run away. Mr. Briggs (I suppose it is Mr. Briggs) will not want me," exclaimed Madge, and she escaped to the renovated drawing-room.

It was Mr. Briggs, and also the doctor, who consulted together before proceeding to visit the invalid. The doctor, having announced his opinion—not a

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favourable one—went on his way. As he went out Brook entered and met Mrs. Pinnock.

"I'll tell Mr. Briggs you are here," she said, with a friendly smile. And she opened the dining-room door.

"I should like to see Mr. Briggs alone, if possible," said Brook, rapidly, in a low tone. "But tell me, how is Mr. Ardell?"

Before Mrs. Pinnock could finish her report, Mr. Briggs came from the next room.

"Very glad to see you," he exclaimed. "Our poor friend is, I fear, rather in a bad way," said Briggs, closing the door as Mrs. Pinnock retreated. "It seems he made a really murderous attack on Miss Ardell, and now he appears to forget all about it and is comparatively quite himself. The doctor, however, does not advise his seeing you. Evidently he has some curious doubts about you."

"I certainly will not intrude myself upon him. But how does this sudden outbreak affect his will?"

"Not at all, I expect. You see, he appeared perfectly sane when he signed it, and for a considerable time after. As I have told you, it is exceedingly unjust and eccentric. Still, it would be very difficult to upset it. Nevertheless, I might, as executor, be able to give Miss Ardell some help; but we must not anticipate. The old gentleman may live several years. But if—if he has another such outbreak, why we must have legal as well as medical advice."

Having escorted him to the door, Brook returned and rang for Mrs. Pinnock.

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"Can I see Miss Ardell?" he asked.

"Yes, to be sure, sir. And I do hope you will help me to get her out of the house for a bit. She is that nervous and shaken—though she do try to seem brave and composed—that I think she'll go off her head, too, if she stays on here. You can come up now, for I think she knows you are in the house."

Brook followed his guide.

"Here's Mr. Brook, Miss Margaret," said Mrs. Pinnock, opening the door, and she hastened away downstairs to her numerous avocations.

"Good Heavens, Madge, how ill you look! What is this extraordinary tale about your grandfather's violence?" he cried, taking her cold little hand in both his own, and gazing earnestly, pityingly into her eyes.

"Extraordinary—yes, but quite true! I never knew what real, wild terror was before I felt the poor old man's frightful clawlike nails clutching my throat."

"What! Do you mean to say he tried to strangle you?"

"He did. Look at these!" She drew down the folds of a white lace handkerchief tied loosely round her throat, to let him see the deep scratches which marked it. "He would have murdered me but for Pinny."

Brook uttered a cry of horror, and, casting all his previous caution to the winds, caught her to him in a close embrace, and drawing down the handkerchief, to look again at the disfiguring traces

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on her throat, kissed them again and again with passionate tenderness. Startled, amazed by this unexpected outbreak, Madge attempted in vain to draw back.

"To think that you were helpless and alone in the hands of a madman, my darling, my beloved!" he exclaimed. "It sets my blood on fire! Why do you shrink from me? You know I love you. You must have known the desperate struggle it has been to keep up the thinnest disguise of friendship. Madge, you do feel for me—with me? O God, how deeply, how passionately I love you!"

"Ah! How sweet it is to be loved!" she whispered very low, as she yielded to the tenderness of his embrace, and gave her soft, tremulous lips to his kisses.

"You must leave this accursed house, my sweet one! The strain is too much for you, although this is not the time to declare an engagement. Give me the right to advise—to direct your life."

"No," said Madge, rallying her strength and spirit. "I may love you very much, but I shall never give away my free will." And she looked up in his face with the smile, half-tender, half-defiant, which he always felt to be so fascinating.

"Do what you like—be what you like—only love me."

"Let us be calm," returned Madge, with a deep sigh. "Why have you let yourself go in this way?"

"Rather, how have I been able to hold the reins so long!" he exclaimed, releasing her. "You took possession of me almost from the first hour we met."

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"It is curious," said Madge, in a quiet, contemplative tone, "but so many things in life are unaccountable."

"Oh, does it matter what is, or is not, so long as this heavenly passion gives us delight?"

"Ah, yes! But, when—when I am older, and all this has evaporated, as I suppose it will—nothing of the sort *can* last—I don't want you to think that if I had not hung as a millstone in the shape of a penniless, obscure wife round your neck you should be so much richer, or in so much better a position."

"I am not a sordid seeker after wealth, Madge."

"I do not think you are! But you are an ambitious man—men ought to be ambitious. They ought to claim the position they feel fitted to fill, and they are hindered, or helped, marvellously by the kind of wife they select (if they ever do select). And you must—you *must* keep your head cool!"

"Whether I am mentally in the torrid or the frigid zone," said Brook, smiling, "I am equally determined never to let you go, my darling, determined little witch! I never met anyone quite like you. You shall be mine—my wife. We may quarrel now and then, but, Heavens! how delicious reconciliation will be! And be assured I have difficulties enough to surmount before the day comes when I can claim you, without raising imaginary obstacles."

"Then you will have time to think," said Madge.

"Do you feel faint? My love, what is it?" he cried. For the agitation, the delight, the desperate struggle to preserve her composure, her hold of her

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sober senses, had overpowered her and she could hardly hold herself up.

"I want Pinny," she murmured. And, somewhat alarmed, Brook rang for that good friend.

Mrs. Pinnock came with a look of surprise on her face. She held a cup in her hand.

"Oh, dear, dear! What's the matter, Miss Margaret? You have just been too long without your milk. I make her drink a cup of warm milk about this time every day."

Then she put eau de Cologne on her handkerchief, and Madge took her milk and began to look more herself.

Brook stood silently in one of the windows, thinking hard. Then, as Margaret murmured a vague apology for her weakness, he walked twice up and down the room, and, having made up his mind, came to a stand opposite the housekeeper.

"Mrs. Pinnock," he said, with a certain dignity in his voice, "I know Miss Ardell loves and trusts you, and I wish you to know that I have, perhaps inconsiderately and prematurely, asked her to be my wife. But a man is not always master of his speech. As she has not absolutely rejected me, I hope hereafter to win her consent, and I want *you* to be on my side."

"Which you may be well sure of, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Pinnock, highly elated. "I always thought as how you were fond of my dear young lady, and I am sure——" She paused, feeling afraid of betraying Madge in any way.

"Thank you heartily!" said Brook. "Now I want

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to consult you as to how we can manage to get Miss Ardell away from this house—from London—for a complete change. She is frightfully run down, and the shock she has sustained is enough——”

“Yes, indeed, sir!” interrupted Mrs. Pinnock, eagerly. “Enough to be the death of her! I have said so from the first. She must go away if she is ever to get up her strength. But what to do, I cannot tell. I could have paid for three or four weeks myself—for I don’t deny that I have saved a bit—but Miss Margaret would not hear of me paying for her, as you may be sure I should be pleased to!”

“I have some money of my own,” said Madge, the colour rising in her cheeks at Brook’s unexpected announcement.

“Miss Ardell need not trouble herself on that score. I shall speak to Mr. Briggs, who, as her grandfather’s agent and legal adviser, is able to do what is needful. He will see that Mr. Ardell must provide the necessary funds. The chief point is to find some suitable abode for Miss Ardell during her convalescence. Do you know anywhere you can recommend?”

“Bless your heart, sir, I have been shut up here so long, I know nothing, and nobody! But I’ll ask the doctor—Dr. Fenton—he is a nice, homely, sensible man, and greatly taken up with Miss Margaret. He’ll be sure to know someone fit to look after her.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Pinnock, thank you heartily!” said Brook, shaking hands with her.

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With her handkerchief to her eyes, Mrs. Pinnock left the room, and Brook went back to Madge's side.

"Why did you tell her?" she asked, for she had been a good deal surprised by his doing so.

"Because I thought it better for you."

"But if an engagement is not to be completely open and avowed it had better be kept profoundly secret."

"Yes, in a general way. But we (I may say *we*, dearest) are rather peculiarly situated. We must keep your grandfather calm, or we must confess his insanity, and put him under restraint. I do not think the poor old man can have more than a few months of life, and it would be cruel to uproot him. You do not care for wealth, Madge; and I only want yourself. My own future promises fairly."

"I do not know what ambition means, but I think I could be ambitious for *you*," said Madge, dreamily. "I should like to bring you wealth, but if you do not care about it, neither do I."

"Then, my sweet, you promise to be my wife—so soon as matters can be arranged?"

"Yes, if you still wish it when the time comes."

"Madge! Why, Madge, what a persistent doubter you are!"

"Perhaps it is because I have a dash of inconsistency in my own nature!"

"Take care, my darling! I can love passionately—aye, and tenderly, too—but I could punish cruelly. And as no woman ever struck so deeply into

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my soul as you have, so should I revenge myself devilishly if you were false."

"I am a coward in some ways," she said, in a meditative tone, "but I don't think *you* would find it easy to frighten me."

Brook laughed. "My time is up: I must tear myself away, little witch! Is it not droll to end our first interview as acknowledged lovers with mutual threats?" He rose. "We part in peace, though, Madge. My Madge, bid me a loving good-bye."

She stood up as he held out his arms, hesitated an instant, growing very white. Then she threw herself into them, clinging close to him.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I may be cross and slow to confess, but I do love you! Love *me*, and I don't care what comes."

"What heaven the love of a real live woman like you is! One more kiss. Another! Till to-morrow, then——"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

DR. FENTON was able to give the desired information, and, under the impetus of Brook's strong will, matters were quickly settled.

Miss Medlicott, a favourite *protégée* of the doctor's, who had retired from the profession of nurse with a neat little sum in cash and set up a lodging-house at Wimbledon, presented herself one pleasant morning in April to escort Miss Ardell to her 'appy 'ealthful 'ome, as she called it. Mrs. Pinnock stole an hour from her own invalid to go as far at least as the station, and returned to feel that her house was indeed left unto her desolate, even though the sympathetic Dabbs awaited her with a freshly-brewed pot of tea and a round of buttered toast.

Mr. Ardell was almost himself again, with a difference. He rose after his breakfast and employed himself looking over and destroying papers and letters.

With some difficulty Mr. Briggs contrived to introduce a specialist; to satisfy Dr. Fenton, he said. This specialist was, in truth, one of the greatest authorities on mental disease, and managed to examine the old man while affecting to be occupied only with his physical condition.

He did not appear to have discovered much, however, and advised giving him his way, as long as he did not shew any disposition to injure himself or others.

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"At his age and in his weakly condition cure is hopeless. Soothing and quiet are the only means we can try," was the great man's dictum.

This brief interlude in Madge's life was the best and brightest experience she had ever known. Her heart's sunshine pervaded every corner of her existence, in spite of her deep but disregarded conviction that nothing so heavenly sweet could last. For the time being she forgot her grandfather, her rather hopeless outlook, her own deficiencies, and revelled in the joy of being beloved—small and poor and plain as she was—by a strong, capable, ambitious man, who thought it well worth his while to run down to her commonplace suburban abode every moment he could spare in order to spend an hour or two with her.

Miss Medlicott's was a very commonplace, suburban house, but exceedingly well kept and comfortable. Madge soon made her two little rooms pretty, and of flowers Brook took care she should have abundance. There were pretty walks all round, and Madge quickly learned her way about. Nor did she hesitate to go alone. Loneliness was always acceptable. In fact, unless Brook was her companion, she preferred it; for had she not a troop of glorious and delicious thoughts to bear her company?

But Brook was not her only visitor. As soon as she had recovered from the fatigue of moving to Laburnam Lodge she sent Dick Waring a little note, telling him how ill she had been in consequence of shock, but that she could not write about it now and must wait till she saw him to tell him.

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This Dick interpreted into an invitation to come and see her, which he did very soon, and was received with frank friendliness. But Madge gave a very mild version of her grandfather's seizure, and they soon wandered to other subjects.

Waring, who seemed quite his old self and to have laid aside the lover completely, told her of the progress he had made with his picture, and held out hopes of further employment in illustration for herself.

Then she shewed him some black and white work with which she had been amusing herself, and he examined it with interest, praising and blaming with his usual discriminating sincerity. Madge was quite exhilarated, as if she had been walking on a cliff in a fresh, healthy breeze, when, to her surprise, and even a little to her dismay, she heard the latch of the gate click, and looking up saw Brook entering the garden.

She felt the colour stealing up in her face. She kept very quiet, however, saying:

"Here is Mr. Brook. He often comes to tell me how my grandfather is and take back a report of me to Mrs. Pinnock."

As she ceased to speak Brook walked in with an air of unmistakable familiarity. He stopped short with a look of displeased surprise at the sight of Waring.

Madge rose, smiling, and shook hands with him.

"You have often heard me speak of Mr. Waring, who has taught me so much."

While she spoke Brook recovered himself and put on the curb.

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"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I assure you your name is a household word at Osborne-place. As representing Mr. Ardell, in a measure, let me thank you heartily for all the kind assistance you have given this young lady."

Waring bowed and smiled, while he thought:

"A deucedly smooth-tongued fellow, and deucedly good-looking, too!" "Oh, I was giving *myself* pleasure," he said, aloud. "If you knew what a relief it is to any artist who pretends to teach, when he finds ability and serious purpose in a pupil, especially a young lady pupil, you would not think I conferred any obligation."

Then their talk took the beaten track—inquiries as to the invalid's health, the condition of Mr. Ardell, the length of Miss Ardell's leave of absence, the weather, etcetera.

At last (a very long last, Brook thought), Waring took leave, Brook accompanying him politely to the gate.

"How—where did that—did Mr. Waring get your address?" asked Brook, rather grimly, when he returned to the sitting-room, and stood on the hearth-rug gazing at Madge as she arranged and put away her drawings.

"From me."

"Why did you give it to him?"

"You would not have me leave so good a friend ignorant of my whereabouts? It would be ungrateful and unwise."

"Perhaps," said Brook, relaxing. "But it will be a nuisance having him here every day."

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"He is too busy to be here every day. And I want you to know him and be friends with him."

"I will try if you like. But I am afraid I am rather disposed to be jealous."

"I am sorry for that. It will make us both uncomfortable. Still, I suspect I am inclined to be jealous myself. I don't think I should like the idea of your paying long, confidential visits to any other woman. And, somehow, I do not fancy you are very constant."

"Why? What reason have you for entertaining so unjust an idea?"

"Oh, I never have any reasons. I have what is much more unerring—instinct."

"What a terrible little witch you are!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Instinct, if not unerring, is, at all events, impregnable, for it presents no salient points of attack. Who can assault the indefinable?"

"That's true," and placing her drawings in their portfolio Madge came over to the fireplace. "You have brought me a newspaper," she said, taking up one he had put on the mantelpiece in a neat roll.

"Newspapers do not interest you much?"

"Not much. I like to read about picture galleries, and exhibitions, and new plays and modes. But I do not understand much of the other things."

"Well, I want you to read something extra dull, a speech about money and mines, and——"

"Ah, that would be too much for me," she interrupted.

"I hope you will not disdain to read it, for *I* was the speaker."

"What, you? Ah, that is quite different. Of

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course I will read it. I should like to hear you speak. Your voice would do very well, and a voice must go a long way. Do tell me what it was about, it will be a help."

"Very well," taking her hand caressingly. "Some foolish people in the city have been getting up a company. I suppose you know what a company means?"

"The word is familiar enough. It's a sort of thing people always lose their money by."

Brook laughed. "A tolerably just epitome of the matter," he said. "You must know that my partner, or rather principal, Mr. Joyce, was induced to buy shares, and I am certain he will lose his money. He is a curious, shy sort of fellow. Therefore, when a meeting of shareholders was called I went and made this speech, advising them to dissolve partnership and return the money subscribed, or as much as they could."

"Very well. I'll give it my best attention," said Madge, solemnly.

"The matter is not really of so much importance, but you see, my darling, I want to make speeches as often as I can and keep myself before the eyes of my fellow-citizens as much as possible, in order to become known. My knowledge of international trade entitles me to speak. I am no impostor."

"Oh, I shall read it with all my wits. I am sure you are twice as keen and penetrating as all those City money-grubbers."

"I am a money-grubber, too," said Brook. "Only money is with me the means to an end—with most money itself is the end."

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"I wish my grandfather would give you all his if it helped you to be happy. But, remember, I should like you just as well if you were a clerk with two guineas a week."

"Ah, Madge, I could not stand obscurity. To me it would be death. How I dread it, you can judge when I say that the only reason I do not insist on your marrying me now—to-morrow, Wednesday, or Thursday—is because I have not yet surmounted a difficulty, which, if not removed, would make your future insecure. If you loved as I do you would know how difficult it is to wait." He had drawn her closer and closer to him till she leant against his shoulder.

There was something inexpressibly tender in her attitude, in the sweetness of her soft brown eyes. Her words, however, disappointed him.

"Why should you be in such haste? Are we not happy enough now? I never was so happy before. I am not sure that I like the notion of being absolutely married. There is a little sameness in marriage, isn't there?"

"Madge, you are the most maddening little wretch that ever tormented a lover! Do you mean to say that you could be satisfied with the incompleteness of a mere engagement?"

"I am so happy now, yes, I think I could. And yet it might be better for me if I loved you less," she said, with a deep sigh.

"How do you mean? Do you distrust me?"

"I hardly know what I mean myself, but I fear the power you are gaining over me——"

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"Is mine, then, a bad influence?"

"I hope not. I think not. But I love freedom, especially mental freedom."

"Which I have no doubt you will always maintain."

Then Brook began to tell her of his last interview with Mr. Ardell, who seemed to have taken back his former favourite into his good graces.

"He is a good deal changed and very weak," continued Brook. "But I fear that neither of us is likely to profit by what the old man will leave behind him. He is not likely to make another will."

Brook was obliged to leave somewhat early, and told Madge he feared he might have to go to the Continent for a while the following week.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nothing that Madge had ever known or even imagined was comparable to the delicious happiness of that month's holiday. Her soul was satisfied for the first time in her existence. Love, companionship, the glorious vitality which returning health poured into her veins all combined to make the world an altogether heavenly place and life an elysium. The temperature fell somewhat after Brook left, but he wrote to her letters which almost atoned for his absence.

She was further pleased by a most unexpected missive from Constance Grey, who she feared must have forgotten her.

After a somewhat lengthy explanation of her silence, caused by the dangerous illness and exceedingly slow recovery of her little girl, which made

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Constance practically a sick nurse for over six months, she proceeded:

"But for this terrible trial, long drawn out, my winter in Paris would have been a very happy time. Mr. Grey was more at home than he has been for a long while. And indeed, dearest Madge, I have often thought of your words, you wise little woman, for you said, when I confessed my gloomy forebodings, that I was only indulging morbid fancies, for which I had not a shadow of foundation. And you were right. Could I but express all my dear husband was to me while our little darling was ill, his devotion to her, his thought and tenderness for me, you would not wonder at my feeling ashamed of myself. But there is a subtle change in Bertie, for which I cannot yet quite account, but it is no lack of affection or sympathy. I am now looking forward to a visit (a short one, I fear) from my wandering spouse. And I should be glad, oh, very glad, of a letter from you. But post between the 25th and 30th. Do not forget this.

"I like my apartments greatly, and we have such a nice Russian-English family, husband and wife, with two dear little children, who are most kind and companionable. So I am not as lonely as I used to be in London; but I *do* want to have a talk with you."

This letter seemed to Madge the final complement of her own rare happiness. She had always been fond of Constance, and, though her junior, loved her with a protective love. There was so much unselfish simplicity in her sweet companion that she felt almost contemptuous pity for her, mixed with a fear that some unseen sorrow awaited her. But for the present she thankfully accepted the mental relief brought her by this letter, and, in her reflections, dreamt of bright days to come for her friend as well as for herself.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"WELL, it is a blessing to have you back!" exclaimed Mrs. Pinnock, as she sat watching Madge unpack her things and thrust them away in her wardrobe. "Oh, my dear, would you mind folding up your underlinen a bit smoother? They don't look even clean when they are all crumpleddy."

"I am neater than I used to be, Pinny—thanks to you."

"And I declare you look a new creature, with just a trifle of colour in your cheeks! And your eyes! Ah, they may well light up, seeing, as they do, the end of your troubles! I'm sure I little thought, when you used to sit here too broken-hearted to sort out your clothes, or swallow a mouthful of food, that before a twelvemonth was well over, you'd be engaged to such a fine, handsome gentleman—and rich into the bargain! Oh, yes, I am quite sure he is. Do *you* believe the poor old master would think such a deal of him if he hadn't a tidy sum of money to his name?"

"And do *you* think my grandfather is really better? Calmer and safer now?"

"Yes, that I do! He only flew out once, that was when he was giving me the monthly money. He asked yesterday if you were ever coming back to read."

Such was Mrs. Pinnock's greeting to her dear Miss Margaret.

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Madge was deeply grateful to Brook for having confided the fact of their engagement to the kindly woman. He had thus secured her much comfort.

Though greatly improved in strength and tone, Madge could not surmount her dread of meeting her grandfather face to face; above all, of being alone with him. But she nerved herself to the task, asking Mrs. Pinnock to bring her work into the dining-room on the first occasion. To her relief, her grandfather took no special notice.

"So you have come back!" he said. "Just look in to-day's paper. There was something I thought I should like read to me."

"You shall hear the headings," said Madge, cheerfully, and she began to read them.

But Mr. Ardell could not remember what it was that had attracted him. So his granddaughter went on to read the details of a new mining scheme in Hungary. Someone had discovered a rich vein of silver in the Carpathians, and a company had been formed to work it.

"Aye, aye!" said Mr. Ardell. "Brook was telling me all about it last time he was here. It promises well, but I'll have none of it. I have nearly settled up everything. If I can only keep what I have, I may snap my fingers at the yellow fiend! You may go on now."

So Madge read on till she was tired, by which time Mr. Ardell seemed sound asleep. She paused, and laid down the paper, whereupon her grandfather woke up.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Why did you stop?"

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So Madge began again, and went on for some time, when Mr. Ardell observed there was nothing in the papers, and said the days were long.

"Yes, you must find them very long. Do you never go out? The weather is fine and warm now; it might do you good to breathe the fresh air. I want you so much to come out with me. Come into Regent's Park. See, I have a little money, and you shall drive there and back. I will pay, and you will have no trouble."

The old man gazed at her wistfully, and murmured:

"To-morrow—yes—to-morrow." There was a pause. Then Mr. Ardell said: "If you have a little money, beware! It is in the beginning that the fiend is most dangerous. He is greedy, and spiteful, and cruel—ah, terribly cruel!" His voice died away.

"Never mind the fiend, sir," said Mrs. Pinnock, looking up over her glasses. "It would do you no end of good to take a drive with Miss Margaret."

"No, not with her. *You* shall come! What strength has a creature like her? And I have none—none. Whoever comes must be able to hold me up."

"Have whichever you like best," cried Madge. "Only do go out a little. It is frightfully bad for you to be always in the house."

\* \* \* \* \*

Brook stayed away longer than he intended. He had several pressing engagements in Paris, but they did not prevent him from writing many letters to Madge, full of tenderness and passionate longing

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for her presence, and though she was infinitely delighted with them, she did not immediately rush to answer them. This evidence of deliberation only strengthened her influence over him. He could not for a moment doubt that she loved him with all her soul and with all her strength. And that strength must be considerable, or she could not have held the reins of her self-control so firmly.

It was towards the end of May, then, that Brook found himself at the entrance of Mr. Ardell's gloomy old house, and recalled the circumstances under which he had met Margaret, and how rapidly his madness about her had grown upon him.

He had dismissed his cab at the corner of the street, as had become almost a habit with him, Mr. Ardell having always expressed his disapprobation of such extravagant habits. As he turned to walk towards the house, he noticed a cab at the door; it drove off rapidly in the same direction in which he was walking, so that he had no chance of seeing who was in it.

This made him vaguely uneasy, though his profound belief in Margaret's firmness of purpose and affection made him slow to entertain jealous fancies.

"That painter fellow is rather too young to crawl about in a growler," he thought. "I wonder what visitor Madge could possibly have: I do not think she knows a creature. I rather imagine that nothing would make her a society woman—all the worse for me! But she shall be what she likes, and do what she likes."

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Reaching the door, he rang, but for some seconds no one came to answer. At last a woman he had never seen before opened a small chink and looked cautiously forth.

"How is Mr. Ardell? Can I see Mrs. Pinnock?"

"The poor gentleman's very bad! And Mrs. Pinnock——"

"Well, Miss Ardell then!" interrupted Brook, impatiently.

"The young lady is out."

"Let Mrs. Pinnock know that Mr. Brook wants to see her. Here—take my card."

The woman reluctantly opened the door a trifle wider, and Brook entered. As he did so, Mrs. Pinnock put out her head from the door of Mr. Ardell's room, and then stepped out cautiously, beckoning him to come nearer.

"Thank God you have come, sir!" she said, in a whisper. "The poor master has had a nasty accident, and has been taken very bad. Step into the dining-room, and I'll come to you in a minute."

Brook obeyed, and the housekeeper soon joined him. He was struck with the strained, distressed look in her eyes, the dark shadows under them, and her general air of weariness, almost exhaustion.

"What has happened?" he asked.

It seemed from her narrative that Mr. Ardell had been fairly well for the last week or two, and had even allowed Madge to persuade him to go out occasionally. The previous day he had been restless, objected to his food, and complained of having been disturbed by visions in the night. He

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refused to go out, and said he wished a fire to be lighted in his bedroom, though it was a fine, warm day. As soon as this was done, he opened his bureau and began to look over his papers—a favourite occupation with him. Seeing him quiet and peaceably employed, Mrs. Pinnock left him to enjoy a talk with her son, who had made his appearance that morning after a long absence. She thought no more of the old man, until she remembered it must be time for his beef-tea, and, looking at the clock, saw she had just time to warm it. On entering his room, she found her master stretched across the grate, and a good deal of paper torn into scraps, some partially burnt, lying about amongst half-consumed sticks and bits of coal.

The dismayed housekeeper screamed to her son, and, between them, they lifted Mr. Ardell on to his bed, cut away his sleeve, and managed to remove his dressing-gown. George Pinnock went to fetch the doctor, who was unfortunately out, and then, at his mother's urgent request, went for Mr. Briggs as fast as a hansom could take him.

On his return, he found the doctor had come, and measures were taken to revive the sufferer, and give him all possible relief.

"The burns are not so bad, but his weakness and the shock he has received make them formidable."

Mr. Briggs came soon, and was greatly shocked at the deathlike appearance of his client.

"And would you believe it, sir," concluded Mrs.

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Pinnock, "after cross-examining us all and the doctor and Tom (who was that useful, I can't tell you), if Mr. Briggs, who is a grand sort of gentleman, didn't go on his knees and poke about the hearth, picking up every morsel of paper, even half-burnt pieces. Then he asked Miss Margaret for a large envelope, and put every bit into it, and *that* inside his breast pocket."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Brook.

"Yes, that he did, sir! Then he said he would let you know, for it was important you should. When he came just now (he has only just gone), he shook his head over the poor master, and said he had written to you, but you were not in London at present, so—but there's Miss Margaret: I hear her step in the hall. What a comfort it will be for her to find you here!"

The next moment Margaret entered. Mrs. Pinnock did not return, and Brook went towards her with outstretched arms.

Madge threw herself into them, and clung to him, trembling but not tearful.

"Is it not dreadful that the poor old man should suffer in this way? But, in spite of the pain, he seems more composed and content than I ever knew him before. I do not fear him now. How thankful I am you have come! You will stay for a while now?"

"Nothing shall force me from you, light of my eyes! until I see you through this time of trouble." And, for some precious moments, the joy of reunion

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wrapped them in forgetfulness of all, save each other.

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When at last Brook reached his office, a note from Mr. Briggs awaited him.

"I have just heard of your return. Pray call here early to-morrow. I am anxious to consult with you. Our poor old friend, Mr. Ardell, has had a bad accident.

"Yours faithfully,

"ROBERT BRIGGS."

It was barely noon when Brook's card was brought to the head of the firm in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He was at once admitted.

"Very much obliged to you for coming at once. You are, I suppose, the only man, save myself, who knows anything of poor Ardell's private life. He was frank enough with me about his affairs, but I never gathered anything from him about his family matters, till that lady wrote from Paris, begging help for his granddaughter. Then I had a great tussle to get him to do anything for her. I do not know now how I succeeded! I must have unknowingly touched some spring, some superstition (for he had some very curious crotchets). So at last he agreed to give her the run of his house—she must have had a bad time of it! What I wanted to speak to you about is this: You know he made a new will some months ago—a very unjust one, to my mind. When he met with this accident—you have been to the house and heard all about it?"

"I have, and seen Mr. Ardell," returned Brook.

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"What papers do you suppose he was destroying?"

"I have no idea," said Brook.

"This identical will!" Briggs unlocked a drawer in his knee-hole table and took out an envelope from which he drew and unfolded a sheet of paper, whereon were pasted a number of torn scraps of paper, some blackened by fire till nearly illegible: some clear, and unmistakably written by a clerk, or scrivener, but, for all purposes of a testamentary nature, effectually destroyed. There was no trace in any of the fragments of Ardell's signature!"

"This is very extraordinary!" said Brook, examining it carefully.

"It is. And if the old man does not rally in a wonderful way—which is not likely—your young friend, Miss Ardell, is heir to all her grandfather's accumulations."

"Which are considerable, I presume?" said Brook.

"Very considerable. Of course, if he dies intestate, all his elaborate precautions, all the machinery of executors, etcetera, are swept away, and Miss Ardell has sole and complete possession of everything—a trying position for so young a girl. I earnestly hope she may fall into good hands."

"If I have any say in the matter, I should advise her to place herself in yours," said Brook.

"Advice which I should reciprocate, my dear sir! I sincerely believe the best thing the young lady could do would be to commit herself to your guidance for life."

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"I am flattered by your good opinion, Mr. Briggs. But these speculations are premature. Besides, Miss Ardell has lived so secluded a life that, until she has seen something more of society, I should not like to incur the reproach of snapping up a wealthy heiress before she had a chance of comparing me with others, or knowing her own mind."

"These scruples——"

"Do not let us discuss them, Mr. Briggs," interrupted Brook. "My old friend has wonderful vitality; he may recover sufficiently to make an entirely different disposition of his property—perhaps bestow it all upon you!" (Briggs shook his head.) "At all events, I am most anxious that no whisper of a possible marriage between myself and Miss Ardell should be breathed. Such an echo might suggest mercenary motives to her, and very seriously hamper me."

"Very well, Mr. Brook. There is nothing therefore to be done but to keep silence, and if Mr. Ardell does *not* rally, I have simply to declare that he died intestate, and that his granddaughter is his sole heir. Indeed, there is no one to interfere with her. By the way, how old is the young lady?"

"I believe she will come of age next December."

"December! Then her minority will hardly count. Well, good-morning! No doubt you are very busy, but pray remember you can rely on me, and you have my best wishes."

"Many thanks. And meantime Miss Ardell had better not know the possibilities before her."

"Quite so, my dear sir, quite so."

## CHAPTER XXX.

LITTLE dreaming of the great change which possibly awaited her, Margaret Ardell did her very best to assist Mrs. Pinnock in her nursing, and to lighten her load. The facility with which everything the old man could require was provided stirred her to wonder where the money came from. Mrs. Pinnock was perfectly splendid in her orders, and even begged "Miss Margaret" to buy a new summer dress and hat, which she steadily declined to do.

Her grandfather meanwhile remained in a curious semi-conscious state, and though after some time his intellect seemed to grow clearer, his bodily weakness was great. He was extremely reluctant to make the smallest exertion, and sometimes he was very irritable, especially if he imagined he was kept waiting for his food, but in general he was absolutely placid.

He liked Madge to read the paper to him in the late afternoon, but he almost always fell asleep during the reading. The doctor said that, considering the great care taken of him, he might linger some months, but he could hardly recover strength enough to be himself again.

Things, therefore, settled down into a natural routine, and Madge even went to work again at the studio, which Waring had begged her to use, at all events while he was out of town.

Brook rarely omitted to call some time every day,

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and Mr. Ardell always looked pleased to see him. Occasionally he took Madge for short excursions into the country, which were indeed refreshing, but he could not conceal from her the gravity and pre-occupation of his mood.

"You are not unhappy, Cecil?" she asked, as they drove back one evening from the station after a delightful ramble in Richmond Park.

"No, by no means, but I confess to feeling anxious. The next two or three months are full of difficulties for me, which require most judicious handling. Your grandfather's condition is very precarious, and if he goes off suddenly, I should like to have some plan arranged for you."

"Oh, I might go to Paris and get something to do. You are often there, so I could see you."

"I shall soon cease to go there, for I hope to be more steady to London. There are changes before us both, sweetheart."

It was now near the end of July. Town was empty: the weather thunderous, with heavy showers and oppressive heat. And still Brook was steady to his office and his friends. Madge remarked that he had rarely stayed for so long a spell unbrokenly in London.

A sort of hushed tranquillity seemed to have settled down over the small household in Osborne-place. Madge felt they were waiting for the end, and was almost surprised at the tenderness and pity which melted her heart when she thought of the barren, isolated existence her grandfather had endured.

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It had been a day of overpowering heat, and throughout it Mr. Ardell was greedy for iced water. Yet his pulse was fairly good and his voice no weaker than usual. His face had lost its eager, half-fierce look, and shewed a faded reflection of the good looks he once possessed.

Brook called in the evening about sunset, and did not ask to see his old friend as it was so late. But Mr. Ardell heard his voice and sent Mrs. Pinnock to call him in.

"How do you feel this evening, sir?" asked Brook, kindly.

"I am well, exceedingly well," returned the old man. "I have no pain and I am at rest. It seems to me there is nothing going on, and that everyone is at rest. Sit down, Brook."

A long silence ensued.

"Where—where is the paper?" asked Mr. Ardell, moving his hands restlessly to and fro on the counterpane.

"Shall I ask your granddaughter to read to you?"

"No, no, *you* can. It's about that Hungarian silver mine."

"Oh, it is some days since the prospectus was in the papers."

"No matter. Have nothing to do with it, Brook. Mines are bad, very bad. No one ever knows what is under the ground. Don't touch it, Brook; no, not with your little finger."

"Very well, Mr. Ardell. I will be guided by your advice."

"You will not regret it, no, you will not regret it."

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He relapsed into silence, and thinking the old man had fallen asleep, Brook kept quiet not to disturb him. Suddenly he exclaimed, in a stronger voice: "It was strange, wasn't it? Very strange!"

"What was strange, Mr. Ardell?" asked Brook, softly.

"That she never came to me before—my poor suffering wife. I have prayed and prayed—the only thing I ever prayed for—that God would let me see her once, if it were only once, with the brightness of Heaven on her face, and let me see that the sorrow and suffering I could not help were lifted off her. But she never came——"

"Never?" murmured Brook.

"Except that one night when she was too strong for him—the yellow fiend! She told me not to fear and not to trouble. And the fiend tried to tear the paper from me, but I succeeded. I gave it to her, and then the fiend grasped me by the shoulder, and you see—you see how deadly he can be. After that he fled away."

"Then he will trouble you no more?" said Brook, greatly touched by the pitiful confession of the old man's weary brain, the merciful vision given to, or imagined, by him at last.

"No more," echoed the failing voice, "no more."

The last utterance was almost inaudible. He turned his head on the pillow, heaved a deep sigh, and seemed to fall into a profound sleep.

Brook stole quietly away and sought Mrs. Pinnock, who usually passed the night in an armchair in the old man's room, and had been waiting to prepare for her vigil.

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At dawn next morning Madge crept into the sick-room, feeling anxious to know how the night had passed and to relieve Mrs. Pinnock.

"Just the same," whispered the housekeeper, in answer to her questioning look. "I've never heard him breathe almost since he settled down between eleven and twelve."

"He must want some nourishment," said Madge, going softly across the room to look at her grandfather. "He looks better. His face looks wonderfully peaceful, but" touching the hand which lay on the quilt, "he is terribly cold."

Mrs. Pinnock came quickly across the room.

"God bless us! He hasn't passed away, surely? Run downstairs, my dear. Wake up Susan" (a resident assistant) "and ask her to run for Dr. Fenton. Say he must come at once. Mr. Ardell is dying!"

Margaret flew to obey.

It was all in vain. The quiet of the room, the warmth of the night after a hard day's work, had soothed the faithful housekeeper into sleep, and the poor old miser had died as he had lived—alone.

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"You need not blame yourself in any way," said the doctor to Mrs. Pinnock, who wept rare tears at the idea of having slept on while her master was dying within a few yards of her. "You could have done no good. I am sure your patient passed peacefully away in his sleep. You could not wish him a more painless end."

Then Mrs. Pinnock persuaded Madge to lie down

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and try to sleep, while she paid the last tribute of service her master could receive from her.

How strange it seemed to Madge to wake and realise that the weird figure of her grandfather had passed out of her life for ever! She thought of him with compassionate tenderness, wondering vaguely what was to become of her.

A subdued air of business pervaded the gloomy house, and people came to and fro and spoke a good deal in whispers.

Mr. Briggs was most sympathetic and deferential, and seemed to Madge peculiarly amiable. He took possession of the deceased's keys and the direction of everything; while Mrs. Pinnock was surprised at the comparatively large sum he gave her on account of current expenses.

"Well, Mr. Brook, I have searched every possible place, and can find no trace of a will. In fact, I feel convinced none exists. He hardly took a pen in hand after he destroyed the last," said Mr. Briggs, as they sat in the dining-room a couple of days after the funeral. "Miss Ardell is the heir to her late grandfather's property. Has the young lady any idea of the change in her circumstances?"

"I fancy not. She is extremely unworldly, and will be at a loss how to dispose of a large fortune."

"Humph! Would *you* explain matters to her?"

"I should prefer your doing so," said Brook. "I have no business to interfere in her affairs."

"Perhaps not, just at present. But I presume hereafter everything will be in your hands."

"I am by no means sure. At any rate, I should like Miss Ardell to be of age before I ask her to

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make so momentous a decision. Shall I ask her to come and speak to you, and leave you together?"

"Pray do so."

"Briggs wants to have a business talk with you, Madge," said Brook, when he had found her busy with some needlework for Mrs. Pinnock. "You had better see him alone, and as I have a lot of people to see this morning we can talk over his communication this evening. What a pale little darling you look in your black garments."

"Is he going to tell me I must leave the house, Cecil?"

"No, no, though probably you will. Come along. Old Briggs doesn't want to waste any time. We'll try and get out of town for a long day to-morrow if possible. You look quite worn out."

Left alone with the lawyer, Madge listened with astonishment to his wonderful news that she was sole heiress to her grandfather. But though she did not doubt the truth, she but faintly realised the immense change it made in her position.

Brook was surprised and pleased at the equanimity with which Madge took her wonderful change of fortune.

"You are thoroughly philosophic, my sweetheart," he said, smiling. "How is it you can meet such a transformation with a cool head and steady pulse? Why, women, and men too, double your age, would be quivering with excitement at the prospect of a luxurious life and all the distinction wealth bestows."

"Such a training as I have had does not fit me to comprehend fully the contrast of my past and pres-

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ent. I value my new possessions chiefly because I can help your plans."

"You are the most generous of women."

"I do not see that. I should like to give you the half of what I possess, or more, but I should also like to keep a good slice for my very own, that no one—not even *you*—could interfere with. But I don't want to speak to anyone about it till I can act; that is, till I am of age."

"Exactly. I agree with you. And for the same reason I think it would be wiser to keep our engagement out of sight until we can be married quietly without asking the Lord Chancellor, or anyone else's permission."

On this point they were quite of one mind. Then Madge suggested that, as everyone was gone, or going, out of town, she might find a cottage or a farmhouse somewhere in the country and take a holiday also.

"I long to get away from town. Poor dear Pinny, too, wants change of scene and fresh air more than I do. Then I cannot think of settling down anywhere till at least I have seen something of Europe."

"You are in no hurry to enter the 'bonds of wedlock,' at all events," said Brook, laughing.

"But you like travelling, too, don't you?"

"I have had nearly enough of it. That is the reason I want to work extra hard for this year to clear the future from a tangle of small matters, and start on broader lines when I have charge of your fortunes as well as my own."

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Those fortunate persons, whose pockets are well-lined, have not much trouble in obtaining what they desire; and the obliging Mr. Briggs, or rather his managing clerk, soon procured for the (now) important Miss Ardell what she wanted, in the shape of rooms in an old-fashioned house on the edge of the New Forest.

Here Madge spent nearly two months in what seemed to her then and ever after, through the silvery mists of memory, a dream of delight. The scenery was of the kind which had the greatest charm for her, and she never wearied of sketching. Then Brook came to and fro frequently, and taught her to drive a sturdy little pony in a light pony carriage.

How sweet were the moments of meeting and parting! For Margaret Ardell was not a caressing woman; but when especially touched by joy or regret, she did not hesitate to shew all the tenderness and ardour of her nature. And Brook never left her without a sense of intoxicating delight in the wealth of love he felt she bestowed upon him, the tokens of which were all the more precious for their rarity.

Under such circumstances time flew fast, and September was in its last days when the weather broke up and Madge determined to return to town, as dripping trees and moaning winds made their forest retreat rather melancholy. Moreover, in a few days Brook, who was absent, would be again in town, and there was much to be done in the months which intervened between the present and Madge's twenty-first birthday.

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Having, with the help of the indefatigable Mr. Briggs, found a pretty little furnished flat in a convenient position, where they soon made themselves at home, Madge and her "right-hand woman" began to realise the enormous difference between London in pennyworths and London in pounds'-worth. In fact, she was half-frightened at the golden haze of happiness which enveloped her future, and the question: "Can it all be true?" frequently rose up from out of the conviction that her time of trouble and darkness was over.

A couple of days after they had established themselves she had some letters forwarded by Mr. Briggs, who sent regularly to Osborne-place to inquire for any which might be sent there. Enclosed was one from Constance Grey, telling her friend that she was in London for a week or two on her way to America, and begging Madge to call as soon as possible.

The next day was crisp and bright, and she started early, eager to see her friend once more.

The address was at a somewhat obscure hotel, the interior of which was better appointed than the outside promised.

She was shewn into a well-furnished room, where she was received by a neat French *bonne*, with whom little Kitty was playing, and running in and out of a bedroom into which it opened. The *bonne* explained fluently that her mistress expected "Mademoiselle," but had been obliged to go out. She would return, however, almost immediately. Would "Mademoiselle" give herself the trouble to sit down?

Madge did so, well pleased to speak French again,

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while Kitty ran to and fro, bringing her treasures of toys and pictures from the inner room.

Having strewn the floor with battered dolls and headless, tailless, nondescript animals, the busy little girl next produced her photographs, also a good deal the worse for wear.

"*Voilà! C' est Alexis!*" she cried, handing Madge the portrait of a man in a fur cap. With the next she cried "Titine," nodding towards the *bonne*. Then came an older and more ill-treated photograph, with torn corners and a good deal scratched. The face had escaped, however, and while the child called out "Dada, dada," in high glee, Madge, with a sense of stupefied amazement, recognised an excellent likeness of Cecil Brook. She did not allow herself to utter a syllable, but sat gazing at the portrait as if struck speechless and motionless.

The *bonne* drew near and said, in a satisfied tone, as if to corroborate the child:

"*Mais oui! C' est Monsieur.*"

Madge looked at the back of the photograph and saw it bore the name "Vandervoort, Antwerp."

There could be no doubt about it. It was Brook's portrait, and Madge's first thought was:

"Can it be possible that he has deceived Constance cruelly? I will not let myself think him guilty of so dreadful a crime until I ask him the meaning of this strange discovery."

She gave back the photo to the nursemaid, who was gathering up the scattered playthings and pictures. Then Madge, taking Kitty on her knee, began to ask her about the garden in Paris, and tried

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to understand her replies, when the door opened to admit Mrs. Grey, who brightened visibly at the sight of her old friend.

"Dearest Madge! I *am* delighted to see you. I began to fear we should not meet before I left England. I believe we sail this day week, and after to-day I do not think I have one to myself. Run away, Kitty, dear, to Titine, and tell her you want your tea now. Give mother a kiss first. How do you think she is looking?" continued the mother as Kitty left the room.

"Not quite so strong as when I saw her last. But she has grown a great deal. She will be tall and very pretty."

"I hope she will. But, dear Madge, she is very delicate. That is partly the reason we are going to America. A very clever doctor in Paris has recommended that she should have two or three years in California; so Bertie, who is most anxious about her, has decided on taking us there. Fortunately our friends, the Adrianoffs, are going out also, and I hope that will be the end of our wanderings. But, Madge, dear, you are looking very ill. Forgive my plain speaking. I wish you could come with us. What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever. My looks were always deceptive. At all events, I can go anywhere I like now."

And Madge proceeded to recount what had happened in the last few months, her grandfather's death, her own accession to all he had left behind.

Here she stopped, not daring to touch on her new

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engagement, and scarcely able to keep her voice steady.

Constance expressed her sincere joy at this happy change in her friend's circumstances. She asked many questions, and seemed very pleased to hear that Mrs. Pinnock was with her as companion and housekeeper. But Madge felt she was trying her strength too far, and began to say she must go away home.

"But, Madge, dear, I may not see you again for months, perhaps for years. Do not leave me so soon."

"If you can let me I will come again. Why, Constance, why do you not persuade Mr. Grey to let me make his acquaintance? Then we should have no difficulty about meeting."

"Don't you see, Madge, that if I had done so at the first, I might have managed all right. But now I do not feel as if I could dare tell him that I have known you all this time and never told him."

"Exactly. It is always the same. Oh, let us pray to be delivered from mysteries and concealments—not that prayers do much good. I must go, Constance, but I will see you again. Don't be afraid, I'll manage. Good-bye, Constance. I love you very much—more than I used, somehow."

Disregarding her friend's opposition Madge rushed away.

"There is something very wrong with her," mused Constance, anxiously. "It was always rather difficult to fathom Madge. I hope she will not get me into a scrape. She is shrewd and cautious, however. I wonder if Bertie would like her. I doubt it."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

MADGE strove hard to reason herself into composure as she drove homewards. She had no right to suspect the lover she loved so well of baseness and deceit. Many a case of apparently overwhelming criminality has been cleared up by a few straightforward words. From Brook's lips alone would she accept evidence against him. She would wait with patience till she could speak to him face to face, when all suspicion and distrust would, no doubt, be swept away by some simple explanation.

At her new abode she found a note from Brook, dated Paris that morning, saying he hoped to be with her early in the afternoon of the following day. Well, her time of waiting would soon be over, and they would both probably find food for laughter in the startling appearance things presented to her unenlightened eyes.

Oh, the waiting of that terrible morning! How cruel it was! Never in all her after years did the sharpness of its impress wear off. She could never think of it without a shudder.

Mrs. Pinnock intimated that she was going out to do some shopping at a remote emporium, famed for its fabulously cheap prices; and Madge was thankful to be alone.

It was not for long. The door-bell sounded, and the next moment she was in Brook's arms, an extraordinary faintness numbing her veins.

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"At last, my darling, at last!" was all he said for the first minute or two. Then he let her disengage herself, and only held her hand.

"I hardly thought I should find you settled in town," he resumed. "You have found a nice little nest already, and a convenient position. Changed times, are they not, sweetheart? I earnestly hope our partings are nearly over."

"God grant it, Cecil!" she replied, in a tone which struck him as unusual, while the searching, pained expression of her eyes told him that all was not well.

"Are you all right, Madge?" he asked, with tender concern.

"Yes," she returned, pulling herself together, and determined to delay the half-dreaded explanation no longer. "Only I am dying of curiosity."

"If I can satisfy it, you need not die."

"Tell me," said Madge, drawing away her hand, and sinking into a chair beside the table on which she leant her elbow, shading her eyes with her hand, "tell me, were you ever photographed in Antwerp, at the studio Vandervoort?"

"I can hardly say. I have been photographed over and over again in all parts of Europe, but I do not specially remember Antwerp. What has put this into your head?"

"Because a portrait of you was put into my hands yesterday by a little girl called Kitty, the daughter of my old friend Constance, now, I believe, Mrs. Grey. And the words 'Antwerp, Vandervoort,' were on the back."

Brook stood suddenly still and silent, his face set and stern.

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"Speak to me—for God's sake, answer!" cried Madge, after an agonised moment of profound silence.

Brook walked away down the length of the room and back, as if he did not hear, and then paused, facing her.

"Have you deceived and betrayed that simple, loving soul?" cried Madge.

"She is my wedded wife, as fast as the laws of the land can make her," he replied, in a deep, hoarse voice. "I cannot tell lies to *you*, though I may have acted them."

Madge lowered her hand from her eyes, and let it lie on the table limp, helpless, expressive of utter despair.

A long pause ensued.

"I am too stunned almost to think," resumed Brook, collecting himself. "Explain to me how this extraordinary acquaintance came about. How was it concealed from me?"

"I have known Constance since I was seven or eight. She was my friend at school, and after, till her father took her away to England. Then we lost sight of each other for some years. Just about the time I first met you I recognised her in Regent's Park. I went to see her. She told me all about her delightful husband: of his wish to keep her out of sight till he had made a fortune, or done something or other. She made me promise never to mention her, or to say I came to see her. I am no gossip; I kept my promise. I wandered blindly into a delicious fool's Paradise. Now all is over,"

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"No, Madge, it need not be! It is *not* over. You can do and dare more than most women. Hear me."

He rapidly sketched his meeting with Constance in Paris, his admiration and pity for her, enslaved as she was by a selfish, tyrannical, ill-tempered father; how he was weak enough to be led away by her youth and grace and charm from the lines along which he expected to travel towards wealth and distinction, the smoothness of which would be endangered by an imprudent marriage.

The objectionable papa was so obliging as to die soon after the hasty union, and, finding his wife wax in his hands, Brook, without any ulterior intention of suppressing her, grew accustomed to put her aside, and postpone to a more convenient time the date of her establishment as his acknowledged partner.

Then he met Madge. From the first she cast a spell over him, which he did not attempt to resist. In truth, the only law which Brook obeyed in some directions was the law of his own will. Slowly but surely, the possibility of leading a double life, of banishing his inconvenient wife, grew upon him. He would take care of her comfort, of the child's fortunes—but to tear himself from Madge—no, nothing should come between them.

And she loved him passionately! If—if only he could persuade her to become his accomplice in the scheme against Constance, all might yet be well.

"Do not give up such happiness as is within our reach without a struggle," he urged, in broken sentences, his breath coming in quick sobs, and kneeling beside her in almost abject entreaty. "If

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you love me, do not consign me to the agony and despair of such a separation! You do not know Constance. She is a sweet, simple, slight creature. Once I am out of her sight, her little girl provided for, Constance would cease to miss me. *You* are too strong and brave to place the degree of value on ceremonies that weaker women do. We might pass a heavenly youth together with very little fear of detection."

"Do you propose to commit bigamy?" said Madge, letting him slip his arm round her waist.

"Yes, I do! I am not in a state of mind to care what I do."

"But I am!" she returned. "You are mad to think of breaking the law."

"I am incapable of taking a reasonable view of anything! You have sprung a most terrible mine upon me. One thing I cannot face: it is parting with you! It is all your fault; you have laid a spell upon me." He rose and paced the room, uttering unconnected ejaculations.

In spite of her profound sorrow, her anger at his treachery to his wife, she could not help feeling pity for the despair depicted in his haggard face. She loved him so much! She felt so keenly that his ardent, profound love for herself was at the root of his wrong-doing. Then the question pressed itself upon her: "How should I feel if he deserted *me* for someone who had, consciously or unconsciously, stolen him from me?"

Brook now spoke more calmly.

"Come, Madge, come; let me talk to you. Sit beside me." He drew her to the sofa, and, still hold-

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ing her hand, sat down by her. "I have always believed you had more courage and force of character than ordinary women," he said. "Even now you do not scream out at my wickedness as most would. I see you sympathise with the horror that has overwhelmed me. Mere forms do not seem mountains of difficulty to your clear-seeing eyes. I shall not only be a happier but a better man if I live under your influence. Constance will be none the worse. And you? Can you give up the delightful hopes, the plans, the divine outlook of love and trust we have revelled in? You cannot doubt that I love you with the purest, deepest love?"

"No. I do believe that your love is real and sincere. It is that which makes me weak—that blunts my righteous wrath—that——"

She stopped suddenly.

"No," she resumed, "I cannot think. I am not mistress of myself when *you* are beside me! If your wife were a selfish, tiresome woman, who spoilt your life, and did not deserve consideration at your hands, I might cast everything to the winds! As it is, I dare not; as it is, I will give you no answer until I have communed with my own heart alone. Go, Cecil, go, my beloved—for I love you—how much, none can know—yet not better than your wife, the mother of your child!"

"Tell me when I may come," he said; and with downcast look he left her.

At last Madge was free to hide herself and her agony in the silence and obscurity of her bedroom.

If she could only sleep! If she could stop thinking, if she could cease to see Brook's despairing face,

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to hear the imploring tones of his voice! How was she to live without hope, without him? Perhaps there was some reason in what he said. Constance might find the love of her child a sufficient atonement for that of her husband. Perhaps she herself with Brook might live together in some other country where they would be unknown, for Madge was not easily frightened from following the impulses of her own determined will; she was not reasonable enough to see the rightful potency of those laws which safeguard society.

Her pulses throbbed, her temples ached; she could hardly refrain from crying aloud in her torture. Why—why had Brook so cruelly deceived both herself and his unfortunate wife? His passionate love for herself might palliate his conduct in her eyes, but she could not doubt what verdict the unprejudiced would pronounce upon him.

If Brook had been married to a low-minded, evil-tempered woman, with whom companionship was impossible and home-life unattainable, she might have been tempted by some wild scheme of illegal union. But Constance was all sweetness and compliance. Was she to be sacrificed, to be robbed of every right, that her husband might enjoy the unbridled indulgence of his lawless fancy?

Then, through her sympathy with her friend, the full shamelessness of the whole story stood out clear before her eyes, and she moaned aloud. She did not want to be alone any more. She wished to lay her head on Pinny's shoulder and weep away some of the bitterness which was eating into her heart.

And Pinny came as soon as she set foot within

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the house door, and heard that Miss Ardell had gone to bed with a bad headache.

"What is the matter, my dear? Are you ill, or is it trouble?" she exclaimed.

"It is trouble, miserable trouble. But ask me no questions. In a few days I will tell you everything. Now let me lean my head against you, and perhaps tears will come and cool my burning eyes. You will not ask me why?"

"Never, my poor dear," cried Mrs. Pinnock, drawing her dear young lady into her arms.

Who can describe all the agonies of such a time! The most eloquent can but produce a wilderness of words, which obscure, rather than convey, a picture of such a mental condition. At last exhaustion brought sleep.

Meantime, the state of the evil-doer was even more pitiable. First came the consciousness of guilt, the exquisite torture of defeat to a most masterful spirit. Then the conviction that, as the glamour of passion faded, so Madge's perception of his shameful breach of truth and honour would grow keener. Still he persevered in his efforts to make her his partner in falsehood and wrong.

But as her mental sight grew accustomed to the gloom which surrounded her, Madge recognised the necessity of renouncing all hope of ever renewing the links which once bound her to Brook.

"I never dreamt you could be so hard," he said one day as he sat with his head in his hands. It was the third interview he had almost forced her to grant him. "I know I have behaved like a villain, but *you* might forgive me."

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"I do, Cecil. But there is no use in keeping up any intercourse. It racks my soul to see you. I make little or no impression upon you, and hereafter you will be thankful to me for saving you from the madness you meditated. Your only chance of recovering your own and my respect is to atone to Constance."

"I never thought I should hear you talk in this strain," exclaimed Brook.

"Yes, I am changed. I have gone through the fire."

"What do you want me to do?"

Madge was silent for an instant. Her big brown eyes, full of despairing love and pity, were fixed on him.

"Go back to Constance. Try to make her life happy and restful. Gratify her by shewing interest in your little daughter. I do not think you can realise what a trying life Constance has had. She could never have felt quite sure of you. As things have turned out we can conceal much of your terrible faithlessness, all your intended crime from her. I will do my best to help you, but you must endeavour to atone."

"I will do what you desire," exclaimed Brook, resting his arm upon the mantelpiece and hiding his face against it. "Life is over for me."

"It need not be, Cecil. You are not old enough to say that. Then, remember, a man ought to be strong enough to keep his private sorrows from affecting his public career."

"His sorrows, yes, but not his shame."

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"None need know what you have done, what you have designed. I will forgive you if you will but atone."

They argued earnestly for some minutes. Madge seemed to merge every consideration in the strong desire to shield Constance from the cruel awakening which probably awaited her.

"How is it," exclaimed Brook at last, "that you seem to have no thought save for Constance? You are a strange creature."

"I shall have many a long day to mourn the past. You and I are past praying for in the matter of consolation. And though I have not much to blame myself for, I cannot get rid of a sense of guilt towards Constance. Nothing would help me to live so much as to feel that *she* is saved from the feeling of death in life which is numbing your heart and mine. Listen to my suggestions."

And Madge proceeded to sketch a plan for knitting up the sorely frayed tie which bound him to his wife.

"I must be enabled to keep up my old friendship with her for a time. I shall have to endure the pain of seeing you together, but I will not break with her at once." Then she told him how afraid Constance was to let her husband know she had indulged in Madge's society. "I will come in any day you fix to see her, as if by accident. Then you can recognise me with stiff, distant politeness, as the granddaughter of an old acquaintance, at whose house you had occasionally seen me. And I will explain how I came to know your wife. You may say something civil about improving the acquaintance. We shall

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not see much of each other. As soon as I am of age and gather up the reins of my fortune in my grasp, I shall leave England for two or three years. And, Cecil, in this renewed union of yours your wife shall not go to you undowered. I shall fulfil my grandfather's intentions—what would have been his intentions had he been sane."

"What do you mean?" he asked, with indifferent curiosity.

"You shall know later," she returned. "Now leave me, Cecil. Do you understand how great a trial it is to see you, to hear your voice—oh, my God, how great!"

She sank into a chair, and covering her eyes with her handkerchief sobbed bitterly for a few moments, while Brook paced the room, not daring to approach her.

But she strove successfully to compose herself.

"Wrong and cruel as you have been I owe you the brightest hours of my life. This is good-bye. I will not see you again alone. Write to me when you have made up your mind to do as I advise and entreat. You need only ask me to call on Constance, appointing the day, and I shall know you are going to give me what comfort you can."

"This is good-bye, then?" cried Brook. "Madge, how can you send me from you? And so coldly! Oh, my beloved, if I were dying you would give me a last kiss, and I *am* dying! Dying to the hopes, the light, the love of life. Farewell to you—to all!"

Madge threw herself into his arms and gave him one long, tender, lingering kiss. Then, tearing herself from his arms, she fled from the room.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Two days later Madge received a note from Brook appointing the following afternoon for the interview with Constance.

At first it seemed more than she could face. Had she the nerve to go through it successfully? What an awful ordeal it would be! She told herself it was the first step towards freedom—freedom from the gnawing sense of wrong-doing which she had unconsciously shared with the really guilty one, and in which she had been for a moment sorely tempted to acquiesce.

Never were more curious parts played by two ex-lovers than in that interview between Brook, his wife, and the girl who had believed herself to be his *fiancée*. The frightened look which came into Constance's face when a servant loudly proclaimed "Miss Ardell," as she entered the room, greatly distressed Madge, who could not but admire the composure of Brook, the grave, distant courtesy with which he affected to hesitate and then to recognise her. The easy self-possession with which he explained the present position of things and his little girl's delicate health was an admirable piece of acting.

Then he expressed his regret that a business engagement of importance obliged him to leave them, but he hoped they would be able to improve their acquaintance hereafter.

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The surprise and pleasure of Constance when she found herself alone with her friend was still more embarrassing. She was astonished at her husband's readiness to forgive her surreptitious friendship, and quite excited at the idea of the extraordinary fact that each had become acquainted unknown to the other.

With promises to meet again soon, Madge escaped from an ordeal to the full as trying as she had anticipated, but it was a considerable time before these promises were fulfilled.

But so severe a mental struggle could not pass away and not leave traces behind. A state of nervous exhaustion and low fever gave Madge a good excuse to escape from any possible meetings by a retreat to the soft air and sunshine of Torquay.

While there Constance wrote frequently, and Madge was comforted by the happy tone of her letters.

"Dear Bertie," though terribly overworked, was so anxious about their sweet little Kitty that he had gone himself with her to a great child's doctor, who pooh-poohed the Californian scheme, and they now decided to pass the winter in Bournemouth, where "dear Bertie" could be constantly with them.

But no change of air or scene seemed to revive Madge. She was utterly listless and unhinged. Mrs. Pinnock was profoundly anxious; while her indignation against Brook was too deep for words. To her only did Madge confide the secret of her sorrow, and well did the worthy woman keep it.

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"The day drags on, tho' storms keep out the sun,  
And thus the heart may break, yet brokenly live on."

The weary days and weeks wore away, and Madge was within a fortnight of her twenty-first birthday before she made a move towards London.

Arrived there, she was anxious to set about her preparations for the long tour she had planned in her own mind, but felt a good deal at a loss how to begin, when, returning one afternoon from a solitary drive, she found Dick Waring's card, and stood a moment in deep thought, gazing upon it.

"He will help me," she said to herself; and went at once to her writing-table to summon him to her aid.

Waring answered in person. He was greatly struck by the alteration in her looks. The light and life seemed to have faded from her face. She was slight to thinness; the rounded lines of her pretty figure had grown angular; her every movement shewed the languor of hopelessness.

"Something has gone terribly wrong," thought Waring, as he held her hand with kindly warmth, and looked compassionately into her eyes. "She has broken with Brook!" Aloud he said: "I fear you have been seriously ill—more so than we imagined."

"I fancy worse than I thought myself. At last, now that I am better, I recognise how slowly I am recovering. I have been taken with a restless fit, and do not think I shall be myself again till I have gone round the world."

"That is feasible enough in these days, if you only have money."

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"I believe I have that, but I am in the dark about organising such an expedition. So I have ventured to trespass on your kindness, which I experienced so abundantly in former days."

"You must know that whatever I can do for you is absolutely at your command!" said Waring, with irrepressible ardour.

They then fell into a serious discussion of routes and stopping places, and finally the cost, which seemed to Madge extremely high, as Waring strongly advised her to engage an experienced travelling manservant, or courier, who would save her much trouble and perhaps expense. Then he promised to make a rough estimate of expenses, and meet Mr. Briggs the day but one following to hear what he said respecting the expedition.

"You will, of course, remember that I cannot go without Mrs. Pinnock!"

"Oh, I am aware of that. And do you know that a tour such as I have glanced at will occupy quite two years? My expedition to Japan, which was limited in every way, took me one."

"I do not care if it takes three or four," said Madge.

This project led to frequent intercourse between Madge and her former master, who was most discreet in preserving a tone of frank friendliness, proving himself a most excellent adviser and right-hand man. At these interviews, Mr. Briggs on one or two occasions assisted; the lawyer was polite to his client's friend, nor did he seem averse to her consulting him in all matters connected with her projected tour.

Nevertheless, Waring was a good deal surprised on receiving a note in which Mr. Briggs requested him to name a day and hour when the old lawyer might call in order to consult with him concerning Miss Ardell's affairs.

Waring wrote to appoint the following afternoon, and Mr. Briggs presented himself punctually.

"Ahem!" he exclaimed, as soon as they had exchanged greetings. "I must begin by saying that I am in a difficulty with Miss Ardell, and need some influential friend to back me up with her. Mr. Brook, being out of the way, I thought perhaps she might listen to you, as I understand you gave her much assistance in her studies."

"I don't think that gives me any right to offer her advice. Why can't you apply to Mr. Brook? I thought before Mr. Ardell's death, she would probably——"

"Yes," interrupted Briggs, eagerly, "so did I—I think I know what you were going to say—I thought it very likely she would marry him, and they would inherit Mr. Ardell's money between them. Now, however, I see it was all a mistake. Mr. Brook came to me a week ago to make a will in favour of his wife and daughter. I was greatly surprised, as I always considered him a bachelor, though I cannot say he ever told me so. At any rate, it appears that Miss Ardell is an old friend of Mrs. Brook's; knew her both before and since her marriage. So I suppose they quite understood their position. However, what has disturbed me is that Miss Ardell proposes to make a deed of gift to Mrs.

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Brook of nearly half of her fortune, alleging that had her grandfather lived to make another will, he would most likely have left a still larger amount to Mr. Brook, and that she wished to settle that sum on his wife, as he could not then refuse to accept it. You see, my dear sir, that such a proceeding is absolute lunacy! Miss Ardell, however, is much set upon it, and told me only the other day that I was not the only lawyer in London, and if I would not do her bidding, she could easily find someone who would. Could it be possible to dissuade her from this quixotic scheme?"

"I am afraid I cannot interfere. I do not fancy you will be able to dissuade Miss Ardell from her purpose. She has no special value for money, nor any tastes on which to expend it. For the present, I should leave her to her own devices. You may rest assured she will carry out her intentions," said Waring.

"I must say I am greatly disappointed that you will not consent to join me in advising her to rescind her very imprudent determination."

"I regret that I dare not take the liberty of obtruding my advice on Miss Ardell. She is, I imagine, very resolute, and quite capable, if you refuse to carry out her wishes, of finding someone who will."

"It is truly deplorable!" exclaimed Briggs, in a dolorous tone. "Can you not suggest some way out of the difficulty?"

Waring shook his head, and after a somewhat eager discussion, the disappointed lawyer bid him good-morning.

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"He believes Brook's story," thought Waring, as he lit his pipe; "but, having seen them together, I cannot doubt the relationship in which he and Madge stood to one another—then. There is an atmosphere about a man and woman who love, when in each other's presence, that one recognises, though it is impossible to explain why you recognise it. My dear little Madge, you have had an evil time of it! How did you come to give your heart to such a black-guard—for I suspect he has deceived you basely. I shall find out the whole mystery before I put it out of my mind! The sooner Madge gets away, the better. Thank God, she is her own mistress, and mistress also of the means to do as she likes; time, change, the interest of her art—for she has a real love for it—will help her to forget. Two or three years hence may probably make a great change."

\* \* \* \* \*

The first of the New Year saw Madge and her good friend start on their projected journey; and, as the former bade a friendly farewell to her legal adviser, who looked not a little downcast, Waring concluded that he had suffered defeat at her hands.

"How can I ever thank you enough for all the valuable help you have given me?" said Madge, lifting her moist eyes to Waring's as they stood together on the deck of a P. and O. steamer bound for Sydney, one clear, frosty morning at Southampton.

"Doing you some service was a most congenial occupation, I assure you," returned Waring, with a smile which was not cheerful. "Now, I am not

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going to worry you with a promise to write. If so disposed, I shall be very grateful for an occasional letter. If not, I shall wait patiently for a *viva voce* account of your adventures when you return. Above all, work—bring back miles of sketches. Ah! there's the bell, 'All ashore.' Good-bye, Mrs. Pinnock. All possible enjoyment and good luck to you! Good-bye, my dear pupil—the best I ever had."

"God be with you, dear friend," she murmured. And, with her handkerchief to her eyes, she hurried below.

So Margaret Ardell disappeared from Europe for a considerable time, and heard only at somewhat long intervals from the few friends she had left. Waring, indeed, never left a letter unanswered, but Madge, as we have said before, hated writing.

Meantime the sunny skies and summer breezes which Constance anticipated would be her lot from henceforth and for ever, now that she was a recognised wife and conscious of having brought a goodly dowry to her husband, were neither as sunny nor as balmy as she expected. True, Brook stayed very steadily at home; but he was silent and depressed. His spirit and energy seemed to have left him. He was kind, indulgent, but indifferent. His moodiness increased, and about a year after Madge had left England Constance, who was on the verge of despair respecting her husband's condition, proposed they should pass the spring in Paris, where Brook always seemed to enjoy himself. *There*, perhaps, the thick veil which had risen up between them, hiding each from the other, might be withdrawn. So she

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prepared for their change of abode with something of hope quivering into faint life once more, for Brook assented to her suggestion with his customary sad compliance.

The day they started was dull and sultry, but promised a smooth sea and a tranquil crossing. All went well in the eyes of Constance, as Brook spoke with more animation than usual.

The fears and distressing uncertainties which harassed this unhappy wife were, however, destined soon to be set at rest.

The evening papers of the same date contained paragraphs headed in large type: "Remarkable Fog in the Channel.—Collision of the Mail-Boat Princess with a Large Cargo Steamer.—Narrow Escape of Crew and Passengers."

"The mail-boat Princess left Dover as usual this morning at 1 p.m., the weather being thick, but not specially so until she was about half-way over, when a fog of unusual density came up from the south-east, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Suddenly, without any warning, a large steamer crashed into the Princess's bows, and but for the calm which prevailed would have produced the most disastrous results. Officers and crew were prompt and energetic. The boats were lowered and the passengers speedily placed in them. As the Princess was sinking many of the crew clambered into the rigging and on to the deck of the colliding vessel. All save one of the engineers and a gentleman passenger escaped. In about an hour and a-half the fog lifted, and the boat from Boulogne to Folkestone rescued the passengers from their uncomfortable position."

Next day the morning papers announced that the

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missing passenger (whose body had been recovered) was Mr. H. C. Brook, of the well-known firm of Joyce and Granton, a gentleman well known and highly esteemed in the City, where his commercial knowledge and liberal views made him the hope of the Progressive party.

Having placed his wife, child and servant safely in the first boat, he returned, for some reason unknown, to the sinking ship and was not seen again alive.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

It was nearly three years since she left England when Margaret found herself in London and the guest of her old friend, who had a pretty house in South Kensington.

She was amazed to find Constance so little altered. She was paler and thinner, and a look of deep sadness lingered about her mouth and in her eyes, but life was not unendurable. Moreover, it was beginning to send forth new shoots, which clustered round her darling Kitty.

With Constance, Margaret Ardell began to realise what home was as she had never done before. Nevertheless, she did not feel disposed to accept Mrs. Brook's suggestion that they should share the same abode. It seemed to her that, in spite of her isolation, she would be happier in a home of her own making. She foresaw, too, that she would be overwhelmed by an ever-increasing crowd of acquaintances if she made London her dwelling-place.

It was long before they spoke of Brook. Margaret naturally avoided the subject. The account

of his death, which she read in the English papers while on her travels, supplemented by a long letter from Waring, had delayed her recovery of strength and composure for many months. And now she shrank from speaking to Constance of her husband; while the latter, vaguely feeling that in some way or other she had failed as a wife—failed to keep her husband's affection, to make him happy—gave a tinge of bitterness to memories which otherwise, though sad, would have been sweet.

At length an accidental allusion unlocked the young widow's lips.

They were sitting together in Waring's studio waiting for the artist who had been painting a portrait of Margaret at Mrs. Brook's request. It was nearly finished, and she had come to inspect it.

"Is it not too bad, Margaret," she exclaimed, having wandered round gazing sadly at the pictures, "that I never could persuade my beloved husband to sit to Mr. Waring. He had such an objection even to be photographed."

"Yes, I wish Mr. Waring had had the chance of painting him. He had a most expressive face."

Mrs. Brook did not answer immediately. At last she said:

'I never knew the real secret of his life. He promised to tell me as soon as all 'was safe,' he said, and then he was snatched away from me. But there was a mystery about him, and Madge, dear, he did not wish to live. It rends my heart to say so, but I could see that he was woefully depressed some months after your splendid gift had made us so in-

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dependent. He did not seem to care for anything. It was I who suggested going to Paris. He used to be so fond of Paris. He said 'Yes' at once. He never refused me anything. Oh! whatever made him unhappy, he did not blame me. That awful day—when he had put Kitty and me and the maid so carefully in the boat—he *would* go back. I implored him to stay, but no! He thought he might be of use. The terrible fog was beginning to lift, and as I kept looking after him a great blaze of lightning shewed him standing on the bulwarks gazing towards us. He must have caught sight of me, for he kissed his hand, and I felt he had bid me farewell for ever. He never tried to save himself. I am sure he did not. How—how did I ever live through that time? How is it I care to live still? Only for Kitty's sake. I always wanted to tell you this, but hadn't the courage." Her sobs stopped her speech. "Never let me speak of it again!" she added, brokenly. "Stop me when I begin. There—there is someone coming upstairs. I must go away. I will drive round the park to cool my burning eyes before I fetch Kitty. My kind regards to Mr. Waring. What a good fellow he is!"

She went hastily away, and Madge sat quite still thinking—thinking. Was it the sense of defeat, the consciousness that he was disgraced, in her eyes and his own, that made life valueless? What a misfortune she had been to Brook!

“So sorry to have kept you waiting,” said Waring’s sonorous, pleasant voice. “And I hear Mrs.

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Brook had not the patience to wait! Now, I wanted to hear what she said about your portrait."

"She is greatly pleased with it. Thinks the likeness perfect." Madge's voice was unsteady, the sound of tears was in her tones.

Waring looked earnestly at her.

"Will you take off your hat? And, Madge," he interrupted, "what has happened? What has distressed you? Forgive me——"

"I have nothing to forgive. Constance has been speaking of the circumstances attending her husband's death, which seem to suggest a mysterious tragedy. She was overcome—and—so was I."

"I wish to Heaven everything would not conspire to remind you of what ought to be forgotten! I wish I could be near you always to—to support and strengthen you. I sometimes think I could—but this is a repetition of the presumption by which I once offended you."

"Offended me! No—never! You were always too good for me."

"Madge, could it be that you might think me capable of being a stay and a comfort? You know I loved you once—nay, always! No one can replace you, and whether you are rich or poor, is, you must know, all the same to me. I dread losing the sweetest, dearest friend by trying to convert her into a wife. May I try, Madge?"

"Before I answer, I have a sad and painful story to tell you. You may think me——"

"Do not distress yourself, my queen," he interrupted. "Can't you guess that I have pieced that

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tragic puzzle together long ago? Madge, put away the past. Let me help you to build up the present and the future. Give me your hand."

The next instant she leant her brow against his shoulder, and was weeping softly and silently.

"I have been so awfully lonely!" she whispered.

"So have I, my darling! Let us bid farewell to solitude, whether we help each other in joy or sorrow."

[THE END.]

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